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A LAGGARD IN LOVE

By ANNIE THOMAS,

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP)

AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "PLAYED OUT," "CALLED TO ACCOUNT,"
"THE DOWER HOUSE," ETC., ETC.

"Lilies for a bridal bed,
Roses for a matron's head,
Violets for a maiden dead!
Pansies let my flowers be!
On the living grave I bear
Scatter them without a tear;
Let no friend, however dear,
Waste one hope, one fear for me."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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A LAGGARD IN LOVE.



CHAPTER I.

THE RUMBLING OF THE EARTHQUAKE.

THE ponies are full of corn and play, and they occupy Annie's attention pretty well from the moment they pull away with a rush from the house in South Moulton Street, till they fall in with the stream of carriages that is setting in for the afternoon drive under the Marble Arch. During this rapid progress the two ladies, who are companions of their own free will, and at the same time rather against their respective judgments and inclinations, have only exchanged monosyllabic

remarks. But Alice has had time to reflect that by her acquiescence in the plan for the disposition of the remainder of the day proposed to her by Lady Galton, she has virtually gone into subjection to that lady, and committed herself to a style of intimacy that will rob her of her independence.

On the other hand, Lady Galton has had time to repent herself of her impulse to be demonstratively friendly, or rather of her having yielded to that impulse. "There was no need for me to have done as much as I would do for any girl to whom Albert got engaged, and I have stupidly done more," she tells herself in a chafed and repentant spirit, as a vision of the chastened joys she will be called upon to behold this evening when the lovers meet, rises before her. "It's like be-mothering Rowley and helping him to do his wooing, to have taken the burden of this girl upon myself in this pro-

nounced way ; just now when I'm distrait, too, on account of mamma's folly."

As if in answer to her thought Alice breaks the silence at this juncture.

"A stranger dropping into one's usual routine makes that routine go very draggingly, doesn't it?"

"Not if the stranger really drops into it," Annie says, with an effort at easy cordiality, feeling the remark to be a rebuke.

"Which the stranger never can do properly and without a hitch," Alice goes on. "This driving in the park comes in to your daily round, and you take it as you do your breakfast and dinner, and think no more about it ; but it's all new to me, and——"

"The novelty isn't intensely amusing," Lady Galton interrupts, "that is just what I feared ; an endless succession of faces you don't know is an infinitely wearisome sight."

"No, it isn't infinitely wearisome any

more than it's intensely annoying," Alice says. "That's just the mistake I have often made when I've taken the responsibility of a stray stranger upon myself for a few hours; it's so natural to fear that the outsider must be finding it flat, if she doesn't portray enthusiastic pleasure and surprise at everything."

"I think if you did that here I should upset you," Annie laughs, and she cannot help wondering where Alice, who has lived all her life in a middle-class country clique, got her graceful composure from, as the girl answers—

"Oh no, you wouldn't. An upset would be melodramatic, and there's a touch of absurdity in every melodramatic action when it's looked back upon in cold blood. I can far easier fancy you're doing anything wrong than anything ridiculous; not that I think for an instant you'd do anything wrong, but I'm *sure* you would never do anything ridiculous."

"Perhaps I should think wrong what you might only consider ridiculous," Annie begins sententiously, but Alice stops her at once, refusing to be put down by anything resembling married woman's airs.

"Not at all ; my code of right and wrong is a very severe one. I've been obliged to make it so, for I have been left to rule myself in a great measure, and I have had to play the part of adviser to brothers who have had no other guide but me."

"Perhaps you would have thought it wrong to marry as I did," Annie says bluntly, colouring a little, as she speaks under the consciousness she has of that action of her life not being altogether above suspicion.

"I don't know how you married."

"Hasn't Rowley told you ? Well, the man I married was a dear, good, kind, trusting, generous gentleman."

"Then you couldn't have been wrong in marrying him, if he was all that."

"Ah! but he was more than that, he was older than my father!"

"How odd that you should never have met with any young man that you could have cared for enough to marry!" Alice says, half turning her head, and contemplating her companion meditatively.

"I see you take things for granted very readily, Miss Adair; do you really hold that comfortable creed that marriages are made in heaven, and that we all marry our first loves, who are invariably the men of our choice? If so, may your fond delusion be realized in your own case."

Lady Galton speaks in tones of unmistakable pain and annoyance. Truth to tell, she is bitterly hurt at that calm assumption of Alice's, that she, Lady Galton, had married an old man because forsooth no young one had been won by her. She remembers Rowley (among others) and all

Rowley's expressed but unspoken desperate love and devotion. She remembers what a sweet temptation these things had been to her, and she does long to tell the girl by her side that she has tasted the pain and pleasure of loving and being loved with a more exquisite perception of its flavour than can ever be Alice's portion. But she checks the longing, and merely hopes that Alice's delusion "may be realised."

"Thank you," Alice says, good-humouredly, "but I don't think I have any delusions on the subject; experience has taught me that the only people who want to marry me are just the very people it would be impossible for me to marry."

"For why?"

"For many reasons."

"Tell me some of them," Lady Galton says, a faint hope rising in her heart that Rowley may be among the impossibilities. Perhaps after all, this Miss Adair may have such a nicely adjusted sense of the fitness

of things, that she may feel her marriage with Rowley would be an untoward thing for him. It is a most marvellous, but most laudable piece of self-abnegation on Alice's part if she has refused Rowley! Lady Galton feels that if such a sacrifice has been made she cannot honour the girl enough—or blame herself enough for having paved the way to an easy renewal of intimacy between Rowley and Alice! “Do tell me some of the reasons that rendered marriage an impossibility with any of the men who have wanted you?” she repeats.

“They have all of them been unpleasant to me,” Alice says, “and most of them have been intolerable.”

“‘Unpleasant and intolerable?’ these are not the epithets that can by any stretch of maiden coyness or indifference be applied to Rowley,” Lady Galton thinks with a mixture of relief and anxiety. It is clear to her that the man she loves can never openly have declared himself to this

girl to whom she (Annie) has for some undefined reason assigned him. And there is satisfaction in this reflection! Alice Lady Galton is prepared to admit is pretty, attractive, and sufficiently well-bred to be forgiven if she marries Rowley. But the offence of rejecting him, even though the rejection may cause him to fall to her own lot, is one that the woman who covets him can never condone.

"What have they been—beardless boys, or bald-headed men?" Lady Galton asks, treating the subjects lightly, but determined to pursue it to some sort of conclusion. "Unroll the list of them; there can be no treachery in your doing so if I don't know any of them."

"You never even heard of one of them," Alice says, turning her face quite round for Lady Galton's inspection, "still it would be rather mean of me to hold them up to ridicule, wouldn't it? They're all of them married but one, and I go to tea with their

wives, and they come and dine with us on their way through Coulthurst to the town beyond, as on market days ; you see there's no romance about them."

"How about the one who isn't married?" Lady Galton persists. "I'm sure he wears the willow."

"He's much too nice a fellow to do anything so silly ; I was wrong in saying they were *all* unpleasant to me—he couldn't be unpleasant to any girl, only——"

"Only something came between you, was that it?" Lady Galton asks, hoping, oh ! so fondly, that it is a "something" which may be removed.

"Nothing came between us," Alice says stoutly ; "he was one of the boys' school-fellows and friends, and we all grew up together and were fond of each other, and when he wanted to marry me, I was so surprised and sorry, that he saw it was no use ; so he said no more about it, and we all go on just as we did before."

"Tell me about him."

"How can the subject have any interest for you?" Alice asks inquiringly; "he is unknown to you, and a description of him would seem a very flat thing to you; he's only a good fellow—nothing more."

"I have known so few men that I could conscientiously declare to be 'good fellows,' that I fancy I should take an interest in this lover of yours, if he is one as you say. My husband and his young cousin Rowley are the only two men to whom I would apply that epithet."

"Yes," Alice says thoughtfully, "Rowley deserves good words to be said of him; yet even about Rowley there is a balancing 'but;' he is a fine character; but he would be a finer one if he got over the habit he has of halting between two opinions, and of delaying doing what is his duty, because it may be painful to someone else. Privation would have made Rowley more definite than he has a chance

of becoming now that he has fallen on fortunate days."

"Have you ever preached at Rowley?" the fair charioteer asks, giving her ponies a sharp flick. It seems to her that Rowley, whoever he may eventually marry, must always in a measure belong to a girl who knows so very much about him—in his strength and his weakness—as Alice Adair seems to do.

"Perhaps you would call it preaching. I have advised him sometimes."

"And has he taken your advice?"

"Never, by any chance," Alice says frankly; and Lady Galton recovers her normal amiability in a moment, and says with a smile:

"Nor has he taken mine, though I have sagaciously made it palatable to him."

They are back at the door of the house in South Moulton Street as she says this; and Rowley and Wallace Adair, who have been standing at the window anxiously

expectant of their return, come out to them. At once the two women, who regard Rowley with that keen observance which is the offspring of love and doubt, see that something has occurred to distress him.

"I found a letter from Isabel waiting for me when I went home from the office," he begins, explaining at once to Annie, "I must break my engagement for this evening with you. My father is very ill, and there's some misery at work in the dark that I must go down and unearth at once."

He addresses Annie Galton ; but as he speaks he hands the letter from his sister to Alice Adair, and quick as Annie is to feel sympathy for him, and anxiety about those who so nearly concern him, she cannot restrain the pang of annoyance which shoots through her heart as she marks the superior confidence he reposes in that other one.

"I am sorry for your trouble—sorry for the need there is for you to go home on a painful mission," she says eagerly, leaning forward and giving her hand to Rowley. But though she gives him her hand, and responds heartily to the warm grasp he gives it, she is possessed the whole time by a little feeling of bitterness as she sees Alice reading his letter as calmly as if it were quite in the order of things that she should have the freedom of his correspondence.

"I am afraid there's trouble in store for you, Rowley," Alice says, looking up with her eyes full of tears. "Isabel is not an alarmist."

"I always thought that good fortune and gout would claim Sir Oliver for their own, some day or other," Wallace interrupts softly; and Alice turns almost impatiently to her brother as she says:

"Please don't talk lightly about it, Wallace. Our dear old friends are in

great sorrow. Lady Galton, will you excuse me this evening ; I shall have no heart for pleasure, until I have better news from Galtonswear."

"Most certainly, Miss Adair, if you wish it," Annie says, speaking coldly, and allowing herself to feel unjustly indignant with Alice for identifying herself with Rowley's family in this way. "As your sister will not be with me, I will not condemn you to a dull evening," she continues, turning to Wallace. "When the temporary clouds have lifted, and Rowley comes back, we shall all meet again, I hope ; until then I will say good-bye."

She tries hard to speak naturally and amiably ; but the effort is almost beyond her. Gloomy, self-absorbed, and evidently deeply distressed as Rowley is, he does not gain a full meed of pity from her now ; for it is to Alice he has turned in his troubles ! it is to Alice he has shown the letter containing all the information of

which he is himself master. "And Alice is wise in her generation," Annie tells herself bitterly. "The heir-apparent will soon be the reigning sovereign ; probably she is teaching him already that his interests are hers."

"I must be off," Rowley says, interrupting her painful meditations. "I shall run down by the eight o'clock train. I won't let another night pass without knowing the worst."

They take leave of each other then, and Annie drives off quickly. The last vision she has of the two is their going in together to the house in which Wallace and his sister are lodging. "He has time to go in with them," she thinks, "though he said he 'must be off' to me, in a tone that was meant to end our interview. Well ! I only care for his happiness, and if she can assure it, I won't grudge him to her."

Nevertheless, though she says this, and though she wishes to speak the truth even

to herself, it is in a very sad spirit that Annie Galton drives back to her solitary home.

Meanwhile Rowley and Wallace are arranging and endeavouring to provide against several of the former's official and educational engagements, and Alice takes the opportunity of their being so engrossed to read again the note of alarm sounded by Isabel, and to try and fathom its deepest meaning. It runs as follows :

"Galtonswear, May 8th.

"DEAREST ROWLEY,

"For several days I have been undecided as to whether I ought to fill your mind with the anxieties and fears that are burdening mine. Mamma and Grace are too much distressed to be able to offer me coherent advice, consequently I must rely upon myself. For many weeks our father has been suffering greatly. So much has been clear to us all ; but whether

the suffering has been mental or physical we could not discover, for he would not let any one approach the subject with him. Three days ago he received a series of telegrams. Since then two or three strange men have been here on business. He will not tell us anything, but his anguish has intensified itself to such a degree as makes your interference necessary. There is no doubt now that his illness is of the mind, not of the body, and I cannot conceive that anything connected with the property only, could cause him such poignant pain. I dare not tell you all I fear, in writing. Only you will understand how urgent the need is for your presence here when I tell you that we are all nearly sick with terror when he gets away by himself. I followed him to the weir last evening, and he turned upon me as angrily as if I had thwarted him in something, or interrupted some cherished scheme. I have heard of the sudden acquisition of wealth that has been

long coveted driving men mad ! It can't be that this calamity is coming upon us. The poverty of our past years was hard to bear, but how fervently we would all have prayed that we might never emerge from it if we had known the effects that absolute possession of all this world can bestow, would have upon our father. I have not said too much, I trust, but on the other hand, dear Rowley, I hope I have said enough to bring you home without delay.

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ ISABEL.”

“ Isabel fears madness, that's plain enough,” Alice says to herself, as she finishes reading the letter, “ but she fears something else too ! ”

“ What is it, Rowley ? ” she asks in continuation of her own line of thought, addressing him quite calmly, as she hands him back the letter.

"It's ruin, I'm afraid," he says, with equal calmness. "My father is not the sort of man who grows depressed from the too incessant contemplation of good fortune ; any way, I must go and find out for myself what it all means ; and you'll give us a thought now and again, won't you, Alice ?"

He speaks in the old, wooing, winning tones ; he does hunger for a touch of womanly sympathy, to be freely bestowed upon him now in the first hour of his trial.

"Yes, Rowley, and if you want me, you'll send for me, that's understood ; if there is illness, I might be useful ; I'm used to it, you know, and they are all used to me."

"Alice, we always want you ; in sickness and in health you're one of us," he says, as heartily as the remembrance of the way in which his family have done without her in their prosperity will permit him to say it. Then he takes leave of her kindly and

cordially, but not sentimentally at all; and with a pang at her heart, that is all for him, Alice sees him go off to face his troubles alone.

Through the drear, long hours of the night, the young heir to the title, broad lands, and grand rent-roll of Galtonswear, travels down in a state between sleeping and waking. In the border-land, Annie and Alice get inextricably mixed up in his mind, and he starts into consciousness, throbbing every now and then under the exciting influence of the conviction he has that Annie has developed into a sort of nursing guardian angel, or æsthetic sister of mercy to his family, while Alice distresses him by strong-mindedly persisting in driving a rough cart and shaggy pony in the park, whenever he is there in the company of his most fastidious friends. At last, after a succession of these dreams a sudden revulsion takes place, and he finds himself shrinking from Alice's

observation, not because her appearance and surroundings distress him, but because he fears that his may distress her. When he throws off this last incubus of sleeping fancy and rouses him to the task of tackling real life again, the train is rushing into the home station, and he is within a mile of the glorious home that has been in his family for three centuries. He cannot help congratulating himself on being the son of such a house, the heir to such a place, the owner of such a name, as he rolls along between close-clipped hedges that border the fields now brightly tinged with the young green corn, and pasture lands golden with buttercups and cowslips. Even in the cold, grey morning light, the lands around look rich and luxuriant, and they are all the Galtons' own, remunerative, well-let, and unmortgaged !

There is something chill and unpromising about the aspect of everything as he stands at the top of the long flight of stone

steps, and thunders away with the knocker. He is unlooked for at this hour, and he is paying the penalty every man ought to pay who arrives at his own house in an untoward way, when he might have advertised his appearance. "Fool I was not to have wired to them," Rowley says to himself, as he stamps impatiently on the door-step, after having knocked with a noise that might cause the dead to congratulate themselves, for the fiftieth time. "Isabel, with her womanly fears and alarms, has got me down for nothing; deep peace reigns in the house, and mine is a fool's errand," the young heir grumbles. Then the door is opened by a servant, who has evidently not been to bed all night, who checks any interjectional remarks from Rowley by exclaiming, "It's by Heaven's mercy, you're here, sir, before the ladies get up and hear it; Sir Oliver is raving mad."

CHAPTER II.

PUT OUT THE LIGHT.

THE moment that he hears this, all the vague, shadowy forms of misery and evil that have been floating about and disturbing Rowley, take form and substance. His father is irresponsible—a heavy charge instead of an authoritatively protecting power. He understands at once that henceforth there must be no dallying with opportunity, no indulgence in day-dreaming and desultory work, no hope of carving out a career and adorning, honouring, and exalting the same for him! His father is “raving mad!” Rowley says these words over and over again to him-

self as he ascends the stairs, and as he says them he breathes a prayer that he may wear these honours and responsibilities which have fallen so prematurely and painfully to his lot, loyally and well. All the social status and consideration, all the difficulties, and disagreeables, and pleasures, and power and glory of the situation will be his. He will be compelled to ascend the throne at once, and, renouncing all his present pursuits and ambitions, give his mind to the task of ruling his little kingdom wisely and benignly. Brief as the passage is from the front door, where he has heard the tidings, to the bedroom where he sits himself down and tries to digest them, he has time to think out a course, and to resolve to keep it! He will so administer the estate that he will save fortunes for his undowered sisters, and at the same time he will make Galtonswear a household word in the county for hospitality and

social success. "And Annie will help me to do both splendidly," he tells himself as he flings himself upon the bed at last, and he never thinks of Alice Adair, who has told him to send up for her if there is sorrow among his kith and she can help them.

He sleeps for an hour or two, and wakes to find the sun streaming into the room. In spite of the sad tale that has been told to him of his father's state, he cannot subdue a throb of pride and pleasure as he goes to the window and looks out over the lands of which he is the lord. He knows that he will have to pass through a very furnace of affliction before he can settle "all for the best." For aught he knows, his father mad may be rather more difficult to deal with than his father sane. If Sir Oliver had been a kind friend, and a wise parent to his children, the task Rowley feels called upon to perform would be an infinitely easier one. But as it is,

he cannot tackle it with affectionate interest. He can only gird himself up to undertake it with the reflection that it is his duty, and that no one can relieve him from the performance of it. But through all this maize of anxiety and perplexity there is a silver rim of satisfaction in the fact that Galtonsweir, and a good income, a splendid position, and almost unbounded local interest, are theirs—are his, in fact, for he will, of course, if this terrible thing is true, have to reign, and reign alone.

He goes through his toilet duties leisurely, for in truth he is in no haste to face what may be before him. In the abstract there is something that is very sweet to him, in fact—though he has gained the knowledge of it so suddenly and painfully—that he is now the mainspring of the family—the source from whence all interest must flow henceforth—the great head-centre of the Galton faction. The way in which his father has been made of no

account, is very awful to him, even though he has mastered none of the details yet. But, at the same time, despite the awfulness of it, there is a tinge of compensating richly-hued splendour. The tragical element in the story is very agonizing, of course! Rowley is "just" enough to be able to stand apart, as it were, from his clan, and see how other people regard it all, now! The story is sad, is pitiful, is indeed horribly short, and crude. A man who has been hampered by circumstances all his life, is suddenly freed from their galling chains, and put into the position of enjoying without let or hindrance, all the goods that gold can give! And while this power has the zest of novelty about it, a greater Power than it steps in, and robs him of all capability of enjoying it! "It is hard! it is cruel! it is bitter! but it's God's will, and He has amply endowed me with the means of nullifying the agony; it may be rendered so tolerable that my poor father

may bear it," the young fellow thinks as he brings his dressing operations to a conclusion. And just as he does so, there comes a knock at his door, and Isabel looks in.

"Rowley! you are come! They told me you had, and I thought the news too good to be true."

Her arms are round her brother's neck as she speaks, and it flashes through him that he is of greater importance to his sisters now than he could ever have been under ordinary circumstances. If in the natural course of events their father had lived for a few years, honoured and honouring, feasting and feasted, seeking and sought in the county, then would they most certainly have been grafted upon other family trees in a satisfactory manner. But as things are turning out, these poor unportioned, unengaged girls are left terribly in the lurch! Rowley cannot help contrasting their ignominious and helpless

position with his own for a moment, as he kisses Isabel affectionately, and says—

“It will be all right, dear little girl ; perhaps I shall take better care of you than the poor old father would ever have done ; he is all for the aggrandisement of the name, you know ; now I shall think more of the happiness of my sisters.”

Isabel lifts her head from her brother's shoulder as he speaks ; when he finishes she says—

“You dear, unselfish boy ; yours will be a humdrum existence after all, if you are going to spend it in looking after Grace's interests and mine ; but there's something better and higher than this before you, Rowley ; I feel that there is. I don't know what it may be yet ; but be a good son to our father, and it will all be made plain to you.”

“Dear little Puritan,” her brother says lovingly, “you evidently fear for me now that I am to be subjected to the

crucial test of having 'gold galore' at my disposal! Do you remember when we were children, how we all used to play at being the Lady of Shalot, and in what different guises we insisted upon the curse descending upon us? I always managed that fame and fortune should be my snares, and (in play) how stoutly I withstood them both, and how gallantly and ingeniously I turned my tyrants into slaves; and now in solemn earnest I will play my part as well."

"Rowley, you will do everything well, and bear everything beautifully, but!—there will be so much for you to do and to bear," Isabel says as she comes downstairs among his subjects with the young uncrowned king.

It seems to Rowley that they all give him too much soft-spoken sympathy and pity as he comes among them a Power, for the first time! His father's state is sad enough, no doubt, but even having

admitted and accepted this fact, there is surely no need for them to festoon the fact before him as a sort of mournful arch under which he must needs pass in order to assume the rights of regency. The old long-established servants who have been living, some of them at Galtonsweir, ever since the reign of the late Sir Rowley's father, and who are accordingly identified with the family and the family's weal, appear to regard the calamity as the heaviest one that could have befallen the house. "It's gratifying to find that they have become so strongly attached to my father!" Rowley thinks, as one after another the various members of the household give the young heir a greeting, that would be very soothing to him were it not so intensely sad.

"Sir Oliver is quiet now," Sir Oliver's own man comes and tells Rowley; "there are two doctors with him, and one or two strong fellows in the dressing-room, in case

one of the paroxysms comes on ; poor gentleman," the man adds emotionally, "perhaps he's happier as he is, though we can't think it, than if he had his reason about him."

The words fell meaninglessly on Rowley's ear. As he hears them he merely tells himself that "that class have very crude notions as to acceptable forms of comfort."

I had better see my poor mother and Grace before I go to my father, I suppose?" he says to Isabel, and she tells him—

"Yes, Rowley, and whatever mamma may say in her misery and excitement, do you be calm and master of yourself ; we know nothing for certainty yet, but we know that something weighed very heavily on papa's mind before it gave way, and we fear that you will have to bear a very grievous disappointment."

She checks her brother at the door of her mother's room as she says this, and

Rowley staggers for a moment as a light is let in upon him.

"Was the 'heavy weight' the dread of ruin?" he asks.

"We fear so. Oh, Rowley, we almost know it; this is *too* hard for you to bear," she cries passionately, for Rowley almost reels as he realises (fully for the first time now that they are threatened) how dear and prized his future prospects have been to him.

In another instant he is quite himself again. "Whatever we may have to suffer, we must keep the extent of it from mother," he whispers, "for she'll suffer doubly for us." Then he, with his sister, goes into that poor mother's presence, and hears from her the tale, told in broken accents, of long heart-wearying nights of anxiety during which she has listened to her sleeping husband's fevered, frightened fancies.

"I never thought he was speculating,"

she tells Rowley, "for weeks I have been wretched about him, but only because I thought he was over greedy of money, and over anxious about the property; but suddenly he raved at me one night when he woke, and vowed I was treacherously trying to find out his secrets; and then suddenly he began to cry like a child, and to ask me "to forgive him for having brought ruin upon his family in his endeavours to benefit them. And he went on wildly talking about the stocks until I found that he had lost everthing he had, Rowley, and more too in some dreadful bonds. At first I tried to hope that they were crazed fancies only that were tormenting him, and I hoped that in the morning I should find out that my poor children were not ruined. But that hope is over, Rowley, that hope is over!"

"Never mind, mother," Rowley says, with a gallant effort to stand erect, and not even to totter under the blow, "never

mind, mother, we'll all make the best of it for you."

The poor faithful wife, and loving mother, who has borne long years of grinding poverty and rasping ill-temper so patiently and cheerfully, breaks down now. These days of assured ease and comfort at Galtonsweir have been such halcyon days to her, for she has been blessed with the sight of her daughters' perfect happiness and comfort and contentment. And it may be added that she has been doubly blessed in having very little of her husband's society! In this latter circumstance she has allowed herself to find a great deal of quiet satisfaction, unalloyed by any conscientious scruples as to there being any lack of wifely loyalty in her patient and pleased endurance of his frequent absences from her side. She has always taken it for granted that he has been pleasantly occupied in looking after some distant portion of the property—

a species of employment which to her certain knowledge has peculiar charms for the man who has been coveting the property all his life. She has honestly believed in his being engaged in work that is dear and congenial to him, and has suffered no pangs of remorse for having reposed in the peace and rest which is never her portion when he is present. And now she knows, poor woman, that this period of rest and peace is over for her, that she has passed this oasis in the desert of her life, and that if she is to be relieved from his unpleasant presence in the future, it will be in a way that will be terribly painful to her. There has been no word said to her yet as to his being sent to an asylum ; but she feels intuitively that the proposal will be made, and she arms her soul for the encounter, and resolves that she will fight with all the strength and weapons she has to "keep him with her." He has been a stern lord,

a harsh husband, a worrying, exacting, carping, fault-finding master to her, the most gentle of slaves, from the hour of their marriage. But now that this grievous burden has been laid upon him, she only remembers what he was before that hour, and her heart goes back to him as lovingly and loyally, as if he had never alienated it by a long course of petty tyranny, and contemptible grumbling. There is a world of high resolve and constancy in the way in which she exerts herself to be definite almost for the first time in her life, and declares that she will "keep him with her." By some fine mental process of which we know nothing, the poor old maniac over whom two doctors, and two or three burly men are watching in anticipation of an outbreak, understands what is passing through the mind of the wife to whom he has rendered himself rather more obnoxious than he has to any other human being, and takes sad comfort from the

reflection that "she will always" take care of him! Verily, she has her reward for her patient endurance of years of wearisome bondage, for now in his darkened soul there gleams one ray of light—and that ray is the instinct that his wife will be his best friend.

CHAPTER III.

SENSE AND SENSITIVENESS.

ROWLEY has to repeatedly assure himself during the dreary weeks that ensue, that he has a "heart for any fate" in order to keep up appearances even with himself. From no other human being can he receive assistance, it appears to him, in this work that is placed in his hands of getting salvage out of the wreck. Everything is gone, and the Galtonswier estate is heavily mortgaged! Sir Oliver has not resigned his reason without sufficient cause. Before he lost it he lost a hundred thousand pounds. The kingdom over which Rowley is called to reign, is pawned beyond all

possibility of redemption, it appears to him. The only charm it has is this one, namely, that he takes it into his own hands, and becomes his own agent and steward. And this is a chance that he dare not give it, for current need will drive him back to the work which he must "go on doing" now, not because he loves it, but because they must all live by it. Hitherto "the grind" has been a source of happiness to him. But now, as he sits with a letter in his hand, that sharply recalls him to his sphere of duty, he girds against the irksomeness of it, and feels that he may degenerate into a mere machine warranted to inject information at so much an hour into the minds of his younger fellow-creatures.

He has pared and cut down, weeded out and pruned off all that savoured of too luxuriant growth in the Galtonsweir establishment. And his mother has never attempted to interfere with the way in which

he has worked his will out. For Rowley has been very merciful in his might, and though his judgment is in favour of the scheme which everyone sets forth to him, of having his father put under what they term "proper restraint," he waives that in obedience to his filial interests, and sanctions his mother's determination to go into more absolute servitude to her husband than it has ever been her lot to endure before. "Let me keep him with me while I can," she pleads, and Rowley, much as he marvels at the manner in which she hugs her chains, puts forth all his powers to aid her in doing so. At any cost, it is decreed that Sir Oliver must be kept at home. At any sacrifice of comfort and convenience which can be made by the rest of the family, Sir Oliver must still have his own rooms, his own attendants, and his own wife about him. "As far as is consistent with the safety of the others, he shall have his own way too," Rowley

promises his mother, when she pleads that the supervision exercised over the husband who had misused his power while he had it, shall "be so slight, that he will never feel it."

"He has grown so gentle that I should have no fear of ill consequences if you would let me take the sole charge of him myself," the poor lady says imploringly to her son.

"He is not to be relied upon any more than any other lunatic," Rowley says decisively. "It's no use, mother, I'm sorry to seem harsh, but I should be a fool if I permitted you to sacrifice yourself and my sisters to your morbidly sensitive notions of duty to my father; he is quiet now—he has been stolidly calm for weeks I admit—but I feel that the curse which has come upon him is the curse of dangerous lunacy; you must promise me that you will never remove the guard I put over him? Unless you do promise me this, I must do violence

to your feelings, and have him removed to an asylum !”

Lady Galton shivers as she listens to her son.

“I know you are meaning all for the best,” she begins, but he interrupts her.

“Yes, mother, and I am doing all for the best according to my lights and my power. I am a poorer man now than I was before my father came to this property, which has been such a curse to us ; my own prospects are blighted for life. It’s as well you should understand the position, and understand also how clearly I see it. I shall have to strain every nerve incessantly, to keep things going in the humblest way here for many years. The poor girls will have to lead a painfully dull and monotonous existence down here, without even a pony carriage ; we shall not be able to afford any society at all, even of the most humdrum description. Do you think, this being the case, that I would go to the

expense of an experienced professional keeper, if I did not deem the having him an absolutely essential condition of the safety of you all? I must be the final court of appeal in this matter, mother. Painful as it may be to you to see my poor father under absolute control, you must see it if you wish to have him at home."

"I could not bear to have him banished. Oh, Rowley, he is your father! he is my husband! We will keep him here in his own house, will we not?" she says, piteously.

"Yes, mother, we will—on my terms, the only terms that will secure your safety," Rowley answers gently enough, but in his heart he is truly tired with his mother's persistent endeavours to get him to allow his father the same amount of liberty and unfettered consideration as that gentleman enjoyed before the darkness fell upon him. However, the question is now, he hopes, finally disposed of, and having made all

arrangements for carrying on the modest melancholy little household, which now occupies a portion only of Galtonswear, the son and bread-winner of the family prepares to return to town.

“Let me know if any of the rules I’ve established relax, will you?” he says to Isabel on the morning of his departure. I’ve a sort of presentiment that my mother will do something injudicious if she has the opportunity, and then something awful will surely happen.”

“Grace and I will never relax our vigilance, I promise you that, Rowley; at least, we won’t while we are here; but I feel that we ought not to stay on living on you; we are clogs on your feet, dear; we ought to go out and work for ourselves.”

“My sisters can’t do that,” Rowley says hastily; “but I don’t see why each of you can’t accept the offer the dowager has made, that one of you shall go and stay with her for a time; will you or Grace go to Annie?”

"Grace may if she likes. I feel that my place is with my poor mother, if you won't let me try to be a governess, Rowley," Isabel says quietly; and Rowley understands that his sister is not pleased with him for having mentioned the Dowager Lady Galton by her christian name.

"Then if Grace goes up to town, Alice Adair might come here and stay with you," he suggests.

"I won't be selfish enough to bring her down here now," his sister answers hastily. "Dear Alice would come willingly enough, I know that; but it is better that she should stay in town now. You'll often want encouragement and sympathy, and Alice will give you both; no one can do it better."

He does not quite like the drift of his sister's remark; at the same time it does not so definitely point his position towards Alice that he can feel himself justified in cavilling at it.

"Sympathy is all nonsense," he says, laughing. "We fellows get on very well without it; it's a stimulant that neither cheers nor inebriates men. As for encouragement, the best form in which that can be offered to me, is in getting me new pupils. Alice wishes to come to you, I know; she told me so before I came down and found how bad things really were; she'll be doubly desirous of doing so now."

"She is a girl well worth winning, Rowley."

"Yes, and I hope she'll be won by some really good fellow," Rowley says stoutly. He has been looking his future searchingly in the face lately, and he sees no promise in it of his ever being able to afford the luxury of a penniless wife. This being the case, he resolves honourably enough that he will not bind Alice in any chain of unspoken sentiment. "We have outgrown the boy-and-girl stage, you know," he explains to his sister, seeing

that she looks a little surprised and pained. "Alice ought to be established soon. She's too good to be left to live either a solitary life, or a slavish one to her family. All I shall say is, God bless her choice and make it a happy one!"

"And you can speak in this way, Rowley?"

"Ay, dear! because I must," he replies, cheerfully. And as the time has come for him to start for the train, the conversation comes to an end.

There are no horses now at Galtonswear; there is not even a pony trap to take the carpet-bag of the heir to the station in these dark days; so he marches off through the grounds and along the high-road carrying it himself, to the consternation of some of the neighbours whom he meets, who have not realized yet how absolute is the ruin which has fallen on the house of Galton. "The young fellow is cutting down everything. I'm afraid he

has a touch of the niggard in him," they say to one another; and they strengthen their fears and convictions by recalling to their memories the fact that Rowley had refused to give up his work even in the first flush of his father's fortune. "Poor Lady Galton and the girls!" pitying acquaintances say to one another, after seeing this fresh proof of Rowley's meanness in his walking with his carpet-bag in his hand; "it's hard on them that poor Sir Oliver should be just mad enough to justify this young fellow in ruling the roast with his narrow spirit." The ones who say this of Rowley are not misjudging him more narrowly and unkindly than the majority of people do misjudge others, when the motives and mainsprings of the actions of those others are sealed books to them.

But the law of compensation works. If these who do not know "the reason why" of it all accuse him of being possessed by

the spirit of parsimony, his friends Wallace and Alice Adair give him the benefit of their most perfect appreciation of all he has done, and is going to do, when he drops in to see them in the evening, And perfect appreciation of his course from Alice Adair is a thing that still thrills Rowley's heart-strings, though he has told himself and his sister that he is quite ready to bless her choice of some other man, and to pray that it may be a happy one.

"So you're still here, Alice?" he remarks, rather feebly. He utters the platitude because he perceives that silence will be subversive of Alice's hardly sustained composure, and, rightly enough, he feels that the silliest sentence he can utter will be pleasanter to look back upon than anything resembling a break-down on Alice's part.

"Yes, I've stayed on day by day, always intending to go home, and never going,"

she says, making a supreme effort to recover herself, and to speak as if the hope of seeing him again had not been the chief cause of her still being here. "You know how it is, Rowley, with Wallace? One day he has got tickets for a theatre, and another day he has holes in his stockings which I must stay and darn, and when we've been to the theatre and I've darned the stockings, he has a country walk for Saturday in view. They are sweet enough to say that they want me at home, but when Wallace wants me I'm afraid that I'm very forgetful of other people's claims."

Wallace acknowledges this tribute paid to him by sisterly affection with a profoundly conceited smile. Alice has undoubtedly always been very dear to him, but just at present she is not only very dear, but essential to him. He is desirous of seeing a great deal of the Dowager Lady Galton, and his sister is an unexcep-

tionable means by which he can attain his end. Oddly enough, the two women have not even given him the trouble of playing his own cards; they have, with the best intentions, played them for him. Annie Galton has sought Alice perpetually; kindly, flatteringly, believing that in so doing she is showing Rowley the only homage she may dare to show him. The vicarious service she thus renders him is a hard one. Few women succeed in so entirely eliminating the "earthly" from their composition as to take a genuine pleasure in the society of a rival whom they believe to be successful; at any rate, Annie is not one of the women who can do this. Accordingly, all the more merit is hers for the thorough way in which she puts Alice at her ease, and makes the latter believe that she is being sought for her own sake a little; and a little more for her brother's. Alice is unacquainted with the conditions of that unjust will of the late Sir Rowley's,

which will leave his young widow penniless if she marries again ; and without being a fortune-hunter for Wallace, his sister feels that a marriage with the dowager would be a fair fate indeed for her brother to achieve. On the face of it there is no reason why he should not achieve it. To be sure Wallace is only secretary to an assurance company at a salary of three hundred a year, with no particular prospect before him of ever materially improving his position. Further, Wallace always has been, and it is to be feared always will be, rather reckless and extravagant. But, after all, on a good income his recklessness would be considered liberality only, and his extravagance would be so well supplied with the means of gratifying itself that it would be in no wise a remarkable or reprehensible thing. With his accustomed candour, Wallace has confided to his sister that his heart is touched—"truly this time," he says—and his hopes high concerning the

widow. "She has a sweet manner to every fellow—it's in her to try to please ; but to me it's so sweet that even if she were not the beauty she is, I should be in love with her," he adds. Alice, listening to him, breathes a silent prayer that for just this once there may be some foundation for Wallace's self satisfaction, and she endeavours to persuade herself that she breathes this prayer solely on Wallace's account, and that no consideration for either Rowley or herself adds force or fervour to it.

But now Rowley is back among them again, and intuition teaches the girl that very shortly the climax will come, and they will all be put to the test. Isabel's letters have prepared Alice for the news of the pitiful change which has taken place in Rowley's prospects, but until she hears of it from his own lips she has hardly realized how great the change is, or how terribly it must affect his whole future. He tells out

the tale of his father's rashness, ruin, and madness straightforwardly and bravely, with no unnecessary circumlocution in his style and no sham sentiment in his manner. The brother and sister listen to him in the one way which enables him to narrate everything to them, that is patiently and intelligently, never interrupting him and never censuring his father, or suggesting that if so-and-so had not been done such-and-such a thing would not have happened.

"It is hard on you, poor old fellow! it's cruelly hard on you," Wallace says, rising up and walking away to the window, to try and shield the expression of the emotion he cannot help feeling at his old friend's downfall from that old friend's observation.

"It's harder on my mother and the girls; it condemns them to a career that will be ten times more depressing and monotonous than the old one at Coulthurst," Rowley says in a low voice, and Alice hears the sadness that is really reigning in his heart

in those lowered tones. Her woman's nature prompts her to offer him enervating pity and sympathy ; her knowledge of what is really stimulating to a man teaches her to check the promptings of her heart, and to say—

“ You're right, Rowley ; it's very much harder on Lady Galton and the girls. They have to stay down there and see it all, and feel that they can do literally nothing but wait ; while you can work and feel that you have all sorts of possibilities before you. Though you have lost all that Sir Rowley and his sons' deaths gave you, you have yourself and your freedom still ; and you haven't sapped your strength by living a life of luxury and ease during these last few months while you could have done it—while you'd have been justified in doing it, in fact.”

“ In fact, you feel with me that as I have the use of my arms and legs and brains, still I've no reason to complain,” Rowley

says, with affected indifference. But in spite of the glib way in which he speaks philosophically of his own fall, he would be better pleased if Alice betrayed a little more anxiety about his bruises, instead of offering him her congratulations on not being quite killed. "She is a dear, good-hearted, plucky girl," he tells himself, "but she has not that sensitiveness about her that a fellow likes to see when he's in trouble. I didn't want her to howl over my change of fortune, but she needn't seem to think that the prospect of grinding away all my life for my bread-and-cheese is a sufficiently good one for me."

Altogether, Wallace's broken tones and Wallace's glistening eyes are infinitely more soothing to Rowley than Alice's sober and discreet utterances on this occasion. And as Rowley does not know that, out of the presence of it, Wallace will never trouble his handsome young head about Rowley's reverse, while Alice will

suffer by it and sorrow for him, there is some justification to be offered for the injustice with which he measures out his gratitude.

CHAPTER IV.

“IT’S TOO HARD!”

It has come to be a habit of the dowager’s to call for Alice every day, either for a morning’s shopping or the five o’clock drive. The charming widow, who is always declaring that she “has had her day” (though in her heart she feels that a brighter day may dawn for her than any she has yet known), feels a genuine generous delight in giving Alice all the pleasure it is in her (Annie’s) power to give or Alice’s power to become the recipient of. Accordingly she drives Alice out daily, and takes her about to parties and to the theatres, and to everything, in fact,

which is going on which can give the girl delight. Yet jealousy is co-existent with all this kindness, and the thought of Rowley is a barrier between the woman and the girl.

It is the morning after Rowley's return from Galtonswear, and as usual the Dowager Lady Galton and Alice are driving together. They have done a little shopping; that is to say, they have lounged for half an hour before one of Marshall and Snelgrove's counters, and Annie has bought a quantity of lace for her young friend, which her young friend would like to dispose of immediately, in order to relieve some family difficulty at home of which she has only this morning become cognizant. But this effort of self-sacrifice may not be made. At present it is Alice's cross to be compelled to walk in silk attire, while her heart aches with the conviction that the dear ones at home are cramping themselves to provide her with it. The having

to accept lace from the dowager is another burden, which Alice bears gracefully enough; and this not because she loves the lace, but because, in spite of that dormant jealousy, she loves the woman.

They have come away from the region of glittering emporiums and thronged pavements, and are driving along towards Kensington Gardens, meaning to get out presently and saunter under green trees for awhile. Their progress is arrested by Albert Fane, much to his sister's surprise, for it is not Albert's wont to disport himself in the Park at this hour. However, it is a pleasant surprise she feels, for Albert's presence is always agreeable to her; and so they get out sooner than they had intended, and sit down with Albert to watch the cavalcade.

"How does it come about that you are idling here?" Annie says to her brother presently; and he tells her, in a bright, boyish, enthusiastic way, that the wheel of

Fortune has turned in his favour with great velocity this morning, and that it is his impatience to tell her the good news which has brought him out here to meet her. And Annie, who has the happy tact of sympathizing instantly with either the joyful or the woeful, coos out congratulations to her brother, in a way that causes him to feel that he is not only well rewarded, but extremely worthy.

He is a fine masculine edition of his graceful sister, this young Albert Fane, but still, for all his bright vivacity and almost boyish *bonhomie* and manly beauty, Alice compares him with Rowley and finds him wanting! "If such a reverse befel him as has befallen Rowley," she says to herself, "he wouldn't have the stamina to stand against it; and his sister is like him!"

The desire to speak about Rowley to these two, with whom she has been contrasting his superior powers of endurance and inferior fortune, is irresistible.

“What a see-saw world it is!” she says suddenly; “this morning you tell us how a feather-weight in the Stock Exchange scales has made you a wealthy man, and last night I was hearing from poor Rowley Galton how an equally light thing has made his father mad and himself a pauper!”

She says it with an unconscious air of being well-informed and quite at home with her topic, which is hurtful to the last degree to Annie. The idea of Rowley in a distress of any kind is infinitely painful, but the idea of Rowley in a distress which he has communicated fully to Alice Adair, while she (Annie) has only heard of it from his sister Isabel, is mortifyingly painful.

“I don’t think things are so desperately bad,” Lady Galton says, trying to speak as if the subject were one in which she took an interest on the broad grounds of humanity only—“I don’t think things are

so desperately bad. Sir Oliver's state is very terrible, of course, but Rowley will be a tower of strength to the family, and under his rule Galtonswear will do much better than it would ever have done under his father's, I'm convinced."

She says these words as one who belongs to the family and who has the honour of the family at stake ought to say them. Her claim to speak authoritatively about the well-being of "her own" is incontestable; only Alice happens to be in possession of certain facts which put Annie's well-meant loyal bit of family fiction entirely out of court. A thrill of pleasure passes through the girl's heart, as she reflects that Rowley has come to her in his misery—not to his bright, well-off cousin, with whom all things monetary are so easy that she cannot realize their going roughly with any one else.

"I am afraid that things are exactly as I have told you," she says, unconsciously

impressing both her hearers with her right to being in possession of the best information by the matter-of-fact way in which she speaks—"I am afraid that things are exactly as I have told you; still I wouldn't call them 'desperately bad.' No case can be quite desperate that Rowley undertakes; he's showing now that he possesses all the qualities a man should possess—energy, fortitude, discretion, perseverance, and coolness." Her voice quivers with pride in her theme.

"How well she knows him!" Annie thinks, "and how ready she is to appreciate him openly! Rowley will love to hear that she has spoken of him in this way, for, in addition to all his other manly qualities, he has a fine stock of vanity. I shall tell him what Alice has said, and he will like her the better for it, and there will be no one to tell him that I adore his good qualities too, and that I should adore him just as much if he didn't possess one of them."

She is so steeped in meditation that she takes no heed of the conversation which is running on meanwhile between her brother Albert and Alice Adair. It has so chanced that, in spite of the intimacy and habit of daily intercourse which exists between the two ladies, Albert has only seen his sister's new friend once before, and on this one occasion he had allowed his disappointment at her not being as lovely as he had heard her described to be, to check his inclination to speak to her. But now that he sees her a second time, he marvels at the disappointment he felt on the first occasion. She shines out in the soft scented air of this "blue unclouded weather" a bright, fresh, unfaded girl. The way in which every movement, every look, every tone, expresses youth and health and freshness is inexpressibly charming to a man who is accustomed to cheeks and lips that require a good many aids to blooming at this time of year and day. He likes her frankness

too. He has heard from his sister that there is "something" between Rowley and Miss Adair, and he has heard from Miss Lowler that this "something" is not clearly defined or altogether satisfactory to the Adair family. It strikes favourably, therefore, upon his manly sense of courage that the girl should thus openly proclaim the high esteem in which she holds Rowley, especially at this moment, when Rowley's fortunes are at such a low ebb. The majority of the young ladies with whom Albert has the honour of being acquainted would be ready enough to cry a man's merits aloud in the market-place if he had just come into a fine property ; but for the one whose riches have all taken wing, they betray, as a rule, a silent sympathy which can never compromise them.

"Poor old Rowley!" he says, as his sister remains in her reverie; "he's made of such splendid stuff that one can't feel anxious about the end of him. Still I feel more

sorry for him than I ever felt for a fellow before just now ; it's such a crusher for a man, that one feels for him all the more because one is certain he's too plucky to be crushed." Albert would like to say something about the magnificent working of the law of compensation, as manifested in the expression of Alice's sympathy, but the girl has impressed him too deeply already for him to rashly adventure upon what may be very delicate ground with her.

"Yes, but all the pity and sympathy must not be expended upon Rowley, Mr. Fane. Naturally you are inclined to think of him first, and to think of him only, but I can't forget that the case of Isabel and Grace is even harder than his."

"What nonsense!" Annie says in an annoyed tone, recalling herself at this moment. "It's hard for them, of course—very, very hard—and no one can regret this dire misfortune that has befallen them more

heartily than I do, but they at least can sit down with the consciousness that their brother will take care of them. They know they have not the onus on themselves."

"It is ten times harder for them to know that the onus is on their brother," Alice says warmly. "It's just as you say: all there is for them to do is to sit down and bear it. Poor Rowley must be up and doing; there is less pain in his part than in theirs."

"And from my point of view his part is so full of pain that I shall be ill able to see him play it," Annie says, with equal warmth. "Rowley suits success so well; he grew more persevering, more industrious, more worthy of it directly it came to him. How you, of all people, can tolerantly regard its being reft from him, and stay to turn aside in order to pity other people, while he's to the fore, deserving of all that you and all of us have to bestow, I cannot understand."

"I don't think Rowley would like to be

pitied," Alice says quietly. "Do you remember how Scott describes the last straw that broke down the patience of the noble Douglas—

‘And last, and worst to spirit proud,
Had borne the pity of the crowd’?”

"The pity of the crowd is quite another matter. I am speaking of the pity of a woman who loves——"

"His sisters and himself much too well even to try and enervate them by proffering it to them," Alice interrupts, and Annie feels unfairly rebuffed. Lady Galton has, with extraordinary magnanimity and very much against the dictates of her own heart, been putting forward Alice Adair's right to be the first to sorrow and sympathize with Rowley. And Alice has cast her right aside as if she did not hold it in high account, and has seemed to take it for granted that Rowley in poverty and obscurity is still very much Rowley in his proper place. To the woman who is

resigning him, this conduct on the part of one to whom he is resigned is intolerable. To the woman who feels that she could hold him if she willed to do so, this apathy in the one who will only gain him (if she gains him at all) through the intervention of others, appear like stolid stupidity.

"Not 'pity' him?" Lady Galton says to herself. "If I didn't feel it would be mean to pit myself against her, I'd 'pity' him in a way that would make him feel the world well lost to gain more pity from me. *Can* he love a girl whose affections are so well regulated that she can pause to consider his *sisters* while he is in the way?"

But while Lady Galton is silently seething about Alice's apparent indifference to the goods the gods have given her, and regarding Rowley rather as a pearl that is cast before swine, Lady Galton's brother sees the subject from the other side, and is steeped in silent admiration for the girl and her conduct. "She can't be in love

with dear old Rowley," he decides; and, for no particular reason, the decision to which he comes is pleasing to him. He thinks that Miss Adair shows very nice, true, sensible, womanly feeling about Rowley's sisters, and no "humbugging sentiment" about Rowley himself.

"I think Miss Adair is quite right," he says, turning to his sister. "It's awfully hard on the girls, who would have married well, if Sir Oliver had held on all right, in a year or two; but Rowley seems to me to be in a better position than he was in before. The sudden access of fortune got his name up as tutor more than his talents had ever done, and though the fortune's gone, the reputation it made for him remains. He can make a capital income if he grinds."

"And now that it's his duty to do it, he *will* grind more than ever," Alice says, with an air of calmly accepting hard times for Rowley that does her a good deal of injury in Lady Galton's eyes.

“Miss Adair will be what some people will call an ‘admirable wife’ for Rowley,” Annie tells herself. “She will see him eating cold mutton and wearing threadbare clothes all the days of his life with the most admirable complacency, and she’ll put down any ill-advised expressions of regret from other people that he should be compelled to do these things, with the most high-minded resignation to the bad circumstances that he is bearing. After all, there is less selfishness in the worldly women who refuse to ‘marry for love’ when there’s no money to support it, rather than plunge a man into an abyss of pettifogging poverty, from which he can never emerge when weighted by a wife and children, than in these disinterested beings who are ready to blast a man’s prospects for the sake of showing their devotion to him. I wouldn’t hamper Rowley with myself for any consideration short of freeing him from every money trouble for the rest of his life.”


I

As Annie thinks these things she cannot refrain from looking reproachfully, almost resentfully at Alice. How can the latter dare, the dowager thinks, to take Rowley and Rowley's altered fate for granted in the cool way she does, when such a woman as Annie herself is ready to give him her fortune, her tears, herself, if only these gifts would be a gain to him?

"It's too hard that both honour and prudence hold me back from telling her what I feel for him, and telling him what I think of her," Annie says to herself indignantly, as she watches the process of her own brother being "carried" by Alice's maidenly reserve and gentle acceptance of the worst that Rowley may be called upon to endure.

It is almost a relief to the dowager when Albert proposes to Alice that she takes a few turns with him, though if she (Annie) could know what is passing in her brother's mind at this moment, she would

be chary of endorsing his proposition. To him Alice appears as a bold-minded young partisan of the whole Galton family, and he longs to applaud her for her partisanship, and hopes to hear that it is not all for Rowley's sake that she has spoken of his sisters as she has spoken. For Albert Fane is a wealthy man now in the present, and anticipates being a far more wealthy one in the future. It is such men as Albert Fane who are free to marry their own loves if they please, however impecunious their own loves may be. Albert would be the last man in the world to interfere with Rowley in any affair, even in the most idle flirtation, but he knows Rowley well, and, knowing Rowley well, he is justified in feeling sure that the latter will not keep hankering round about a girl whom he can never hope to make his wife. He is quite determined to make it all square with Rowley the next time they meet—quite determined to discover if, behind all



Rowley's halting and hesitation, there stalks along anything like a sturdy resolve to take Alice in the end. If the resolve is not there, Albert will feel that there is no disloyalty towards his old friend and tutor in making a desperate endeavour to put himself in what might have been Rowley's place "if" only fate had been kind and Rowley definite.

But he does not betray aught of his purpose as he takes Miss Adair for a few well-ordered turns, while his sister sits and watches the living panorama.

The talk between Albert and Alice Adair is very meaningless, so far as its acting power on the motive of their lives goes. He deals in generous generalities about the Galtons, rather favouring that view she has taken of Rowley not being the injured innocent and pet martyr of the family. In her gratification at finding her sentiments so cordially endorsed, Alice is disposed to attempt a dangerous task,

namely, to try and enlist a brother on her side against his favourite sister's view of the matter under discussion.

"Lady Galton—your sister, I mean, not Rowley's mother—is so good-natured that she will do Rowley more harm than good if she makes him out a hero to himself, just because he isn't as well off as he thought he was going to be for awhile?"

She utters her sentence in an interrogatory way, and Albert replies, with admirable promptitude—

"I quite agree with you; Rowley must put his shoulder to the wheel now, and it's no use for Annie to go with a silken pad to save his shoulder from being rubbed, is it?"

"Your sister would put the pad between the shoulder and the wheel because she would think it a pretty thing to do, without a thought for the poor shoulder, I'm thinking," Alice says, half questioningly, half disapprovingly. "It's in her to try and

befriend a man picturesquely, if he is to be befriended ; but all that sort of thing will do him no real good in the end. Rowley wants nerving for a continuous course of disagreeables ; he can stand them spasmodically gallantly enough, but monotonous poverty will gall him, and I want him to be helped to bear the gall without wincing."

"By Jove! then, Annie will never help him to do that," Annie's brother says heartily. "She winces herself if her horse has to endure inferior corn, or her pet dog weevilly biscuits."

"But a man should endure *everything* uncomplainingly, just because he is a man. Neither the horse nor the dog can help himself, or better his position ; Rowley can do both—and will do both, if he is not disarmed by sympathy that has no stamina in it."

Alice speaks more hardly than she feels, for Rowley's welfare and Rowley's happi-

ness are very dear things to her, and she resents the idea of their being imperilled by the injudicious sympathy of another woman. "Pitying him with tears in her voice won't put money in Rowley's purse, or help him to show a cool, calm front, when other people treat him with callous indifference," she tells herself, as she passes up and down with Annie's brother, and marks the air of chastened gloom which pervades Annie herself.

Presently, in the course of their promenade, they meet Mrs. Fane and Miss Lowler, who have left their plump, warm brougham in search of a breath of fresh air. As soon as Mrs. Fane hears that Annie is sitting down a little further on, the affectionate mother waddles off in search of her child, and for a few minutes Miss Lowler lingers with the man she loves, and this young cousin of hers who seems to be engrossing him.

Miss Lowler has left young womanhood

some way behind her, but her heart throbs as hotly for Albert Fane as if she were sixteen instead of six and thirty. She knows—none better!—as she lingers by this pair, that the contrast between their youth, and grace, and comeliness and her unattractive self is a sharply outlined one. She knows—none better!—that her presence never wins her one kindly thought from Albert; that, on the contrary, he shrinks from it and avoids it, and averts his gaze from it, as he shrinks and avoids and averts his gaze from every other object in life that is repugnant to him. She knows that, loiter as long as she may, he will not give her one word more than courtesy absolutely extracts from him. And still painful as the staying is, with these convictions pressing in upon her mind, the going away from him will be more painful still. Middle-aged, ungraceful in face, figure, and form, as she is, she possesses the womanly attribute of loving

to an extent that is both ridiculous and alarming. This young, good-looking fellow, who from his boyhood has always treated her with a stinging mixture of aversion and indifference, has a fascination for her that makes the moments spent in his careless presence blissful in comparison with those barren ones in which she does not behold him. Tigerish love, tigerish jealousy have possession of her now, as she sees his liking and admiration for his graceful companion. The woman loathes herself and hates her parents for her unlovable physique. She could strike Alice dead at her feet for being endowed with those forget-me-not eyes and that supple, straight, slender figure. She knows that the constraint she is compelled to put upon herself is forcing the angry blood up into her face, and that the coarse colour which is rapidly overspreading her chin and throat is revolting in the eyes of the one man in the world to whom she would seem fair. She

knows that the sole interest she possesses for him is the interest of repugnance ; and still she lingers on, hungering for a word or a glance, which both reason and intuition tell her she will never get from Albert Fane.

Hitherto this woman, whose devotion to him is about as acceptable to Albert as the affectionate advances of a black beetle or a white ant would be, has been spared the sight of his preference for another woman. But to-day his manner towards Alice makes up for all the arrears of immunity from that special form of suffering which Miss Lowler owes him. He shows her how chivalrously tender and respectful he can be to a woman he likes. He shows how he can forget himself—her—the world, when Alice speaks to him. And she, who loves him better than the world or herself, stands by and cannot tear herself away from the sight.

It goads her into a desperate course

presently, and leads her to take action that may be dangerous to herself as well as to others; but she is ready to risk anything rather than let him drift into downright love for Alice without a check. "Why should this girl, simply because she has youth and good looks, have it all her own way with two men?" she asks herself, and she determines to make such a mention of Rowley as shall recall Alice to herself.

"This business of the Galtons must be very dreadful for you, dear," she says suavely.

"It is. But how did you hear of it?" Alice answers quickly.

"Oh, such news flies, and I have some friends down near Galtonsweir. They tell me Rowley is screwing in every direction, and that his parsimonious spirit has become quite a proverb down there. Every one pities his mother and sisters; but, as *I* said when I heard it, *I* pity you."

"Why?" Alice asks boldly, fronting

round on Miss Lowler in a way that made the latter shrink—almost shrivel, in fact—and look meaner than ever. "Why? I suffer a good deal of anxiety about my dear old friends, naturally, but that is hardly a case for pity."

"Then I suppose it's off, is it?" Miss Lowler rejoins, in a hollow whisper that is carefully modulated to reach Albert's ear.

"What is it?" Alice says.

"Now, Alice, my dear, you were always very reserved on the point yourself, I know, and quite right too, as there's always a chance of the proverbial slip between cup and lip; but still, of course, I *did* hear from your mother and the others, and I say again I am very sorry for you."

"Miss Lowler is good at enigmas, or rather at muffling up her meaning in wordy swaddling clothes," Albert says angrily.

"I am sorry if I have transgressed in alluding to it," Miss Lowler says, glancing quickly from one to the other of her audi-

tors, "but really I thought it was so well understood that I might venture before Lady Galton's brother to speak of it; but if it's off——"

"Do speak out," Alice says, with a flash; "I don't like mystery-mongering. You can't mean that my friendship for the Galtons 'is off,' because they have fallen upon evil days, so I should like to know what you do mean."

"Your engagement with Rowley—if you will make me speak," Miss Lowler retorts; and Alice scarcely changes colour as she replies—

"It is not 'off,' because it has never been on."

"You are quite right to deny it now that it is questionable whether or not he will ever be able to fulfil it," Miss Lowler says, in a laughing whisper that seems to profess a desire for confidential privacy, though at the same time it is so attuned that every syllable falls distinctly on Albert's ear.

In a moment Alice pauses in uncertainty. It is hard to be taunted with her love and her want of it in the same breath, but the girl is so "true" that she is equal to the occasion. Her hesitation is not caused by cowardice; it is only the effect of the natural disinclination she feels to proclaim herself less loved than loving. Presently she bravely conquers this expression of weakness, and says—

"If Rowley had given me the right to do so, I should claim him as my own so gladly now, for I am very proud of him; but as he has not conferred that privilege upon me, all your innuendoes are powerless to do it. Mr. Fane, I think it is time that we went back to join your sister."

She turns round in a haughty, careless way that is new to her, as she speaks, and the other two have no option but to follow her. "She loves Rowley or she wouldn't fire up like that," Albert thinks, as he marks the suppressed anger in her face;

and Miss Lowler, keenly noting him, tells herself—

“He cares for that doll, who is ready to throw aside Rowley Galton now that his fortunes are low ; but Albert shall see her in her true colours—painted in by me.”

Miss Lowler is a mean-natured, narrow-minded woman, whose naturally bad temper has been kept in check for years. In person she is unattractive, in manner she is devoid of all fascination, in mind she is below mediocrity ! But nevertheless she is to be pitied now, as she walks along a little in the wake of this fine young couple, the one of whom is hating, the other despising her. The free-swinging, firm gait, which distinguishes Alice, makes Miss Lowler’s crisp, perky little step the more remarkable for its want of ease and grace. “Why should she have everything—the face that charms, the form that is so fitted to illustrate the poetry of motion, and the intelligence to use these gifts in a graceful

way that gains her love, which she only seems to undervalue because she is so sure of it? Why should she have everything, and I nothing, save a heart capable of a far deeper devotion than she can ever feel?"

She marks all the points of difference between Alice's *personnel* and her own with such painful perspicuity. Alice's slender, high-arched foot is planted firmly on the ground, peeping out from beneath the hem of her garments in a way that does not seek observation, but commands it. Miss Lowler's square, flat one protrudes from the hem of her garments also, and it looks so huge and heavy that one involuntarily pities the turf or gravel upon which it treads. Alice's plain, deftly cut Princess robe swathes her lissom form in folds that are artistic without being indelicate. Miss Lowler's makes her uncomfortable, as she paces along before the critics of the Row, for it outlines her figure in a way that reveals all its defects with crude, painful

harshness. The curve of Alice's wrist, as she holds her sunshade up, is a thing of beauty, a sight to behold. Miss Lowler tries to copy that curve, and only succeeds in making her large wrist-bone stand out prominently, and in bursting the buttons off her glove. It is pitiable to see the elder woman, as she strives to keep pace with her young companion, and endeavours to look unconcerned and as if she rather likes the post of foil to Alice than otherwise. And all the while Alice is so superbly indifferent to her own superiority, and so gallingly unconscious of Miss Lowler having the hardihood to pit herself against her (Alice) in any way. All the girl feels is annoyance at the woman's having dared to take Rowley's name in vain. She does not for a moment deign to analyze the motive which has led Miss Rowley to do it.

Albert does condescend to analyze it, however, and arrives at a clear comprehension of it very quickly. "She wants to put

a spoke in Miss Adair's wheel, by making me fancy that she's in love with Rowley, and mercenarily ready to resign him. I'll let the girl know that the old cat's words have no weight with me. Besides, even if there has been anything between them, a girl is justified in getting out of an affair when it's a forlorn hope to hang on to it. I'll let her see that I don't blame her!"

Fraught with this magnanimous determination, Albert proceeds to reassure Alice, by saying, just as they rejoin his sister, and under cover of the volley of words with which the latter is greeted by Miss Lowler—

"You stood to your guns splendidly about Rowley, Miss Adair. It's the regular trick of a spiteful woman to try and make a girl say something ungenerous about one fellow before another; but you baffled her gloriously."

"No one will ever goad me into saying anything ungenerous about Rowley; I'm too fond of him."

"I beg your pardon; I fear that I, in reliance on what you said just now, have been treading on delicate ground?"

He cannot eliminate all traces of anxiety from the tone and manner in which he says this, and Alice sees and understands it.

"Don't apologize, Mr. Fane. I speak of Rowley as I feel, and that is warmly and well—just as I feel for and speak of them all, in fact. My words about him had no deeper meaning than 'was precisely expressed by them; but I will not be stung into speaking shallowly about him, or any of my friends, by another woman's invidious tongue."

Alice looks very bright and brave and determined as she says this, and Albert's eyes are fixed upon her with a gaze whose ardent admiration stings Miss Lowler's soul to fury. "He's a fool for being at the feet of a girl who has thrown herself at another man's head ineffectually, as she has thrown herself at Rowley Galton all

these years ; he is a fool for being at her feet, but she shall suffer for having brought him there."

She has no further opportunity just now of bringing more of her spiteful artillery to bear upon Alice Adair, for the dowager seems too much depressed by her interview with her mother to care to endure more of the burden and heat of the day in the Park.

"If you're as tired of this raree-show as I am, you will be glad to go home," she says to Alice ; and Mrs. Fane bridles and blushes as she listens to her daughter's proposition, and thanks Heaven that she herself is much more magnanimous than the majority of women.

CHAPTER V.

IS IT FRIENDSHIP?

BRIEFLY, this is what has taken place between the mother and child. The elder lady, as has been seen, joined Lady Galton while the latter was sitting alone, gloomily meditating on Rowley and on the indifference, which almost amounts to impertinence, which Alice Adair is displaying about Rowley's reverse of fortune. "I don't like to see a girl ready to descend from the heights of sentiment to the level plain of friendship as soon as a man is in trouble," the dowager tells herself, as she watches the receding forms of her brother and Alice Adair; "and now that Rowley appears to be no longer a profitable investment for

her patience, and common sense, and general superiority to womanly weakness, she is going to pose as the 'perfect woman nobly planned' for Albert's benefit. For Rowley's sake I took her at her own valuation, and I find I have been leaning on a broken reed ; she's too ready to adapt herself to the exigencies of the hour to win my respect, and she's too hard to win my love. I would rather that Rowley had selected an affectionate fool, or a thorough-paced, sterling woman of the world. I could have dealt definitely with either. But Alice is so admirable, when viewed broadly, that it seems unjust to go into detail as far as she is concerned."

It is just as Annie's reflections have reached this point that her mother joins her, and the interruption is so inopportune, and the interrupter so uncongenial, that poor Annie feels as if Fate must have resolved to do her worst to-day. There has been a tacit cessation of intercourse

between the two ladies lately, ever since that day, in fact, when Mrs. Fane told the tale of Mr. Cairn's love and offer of marriage to her daughter. The subject has not been mooted between them since, even on the rare occasions of their meeting in society, and it is, therefore, with a throb of something resembling indignant surprise that Annie listens to her mother's opening remark.

"My dear girl, I am really going to scold you. Why do you so pertinaciously refuse to see Mr. Cairn? Your conduct places me in a very delicate and peculiar position."

"Oh, mamma, I did hope, as I had heard nothing more of it, that all that nonsense was dead and buried," Annie says impatiently. Mr. Cairn and Mr. Cairn's fatuous conduct are too insignificant and distasteful to her altogether for her to consider them now that her mind is surcharged with doubt and fear for Rowley.

"He has, with the utmost delicacy, refrained from seeking me all this time," Mrs. Fane goes on, disregarding her daughter's protest; "but this morning I met him just as I drove into the Park, and I called him up, and heard from him that he has not been able to gain access to you, though he has called two or three times."

Annie laughs against her will; the subject would be a purely ridiculous one to her if her own mother had no share in it. As it is, humiliation stultifies her sense of absurdity.

"Why should he want to see me, simply to tell me that he has made a goose of himself, mamma? He knows me well enough to feel quite sure that I shall never endorse his folly. If he means—and you mean—to carry the scheme through to its bitterly silly end, you shall do so without let or hindrance from me, but never with my approval."

"Your mute antagonism may have a

very much more serious effect than you suppose, Annie," Mrs. Fane says stiffly. "Of course, it's very natural that the young man should wait to see his way to entering the family harmoniously; but though I have patience—modest, womanly patience—in such matters, I have also a *little* pride, and Mr. Cairn, when he has got over his scruples about pleasing or displeasing you, may find that he has waited too long."

"Mamma," Annie says, with a sudden flash of intelligence on the subject which has not been vouchsafed to her before, "are you sure that Mr. Cairn proposed marriage to you? Is there not some mistake about it?"

"He said that he trusted that much nearer and dearer relations might exist between us some day or other, and—but really, even to you, it is difficult to repeat all he said. I only know that I have never had a moment's doubt as to his meaning; indeed, how could I, when he asked me to influence *you* in favour of his suit?"

"Well, mamma," Annie says, just as the trio come up to join them, "I promise you this : I will see Mr. Cairn when he calls the next time ; and if he makes a lucid statement to me, I will say no word that can interfere with your happiness or his."

Lady Galton, shortly after this, drives her friend Alice Adair home as usual, and takes leave of her not at all as usual. The dowager is aggrieved beyond all power of concealing her grievance at the way Alice has demeaned herself about Rowley. "She has given me the impression that she feels she holds Rowley in the hollow of her hand, and she has given Albert the impression that she is ready to relinquish Rowley, and that without causing Albert to consider her a coquette. She's a dreadful girl ! She will always seem to do high-minded things, and to have a well-balanced mind ; and she makes me look like an impulsive fool by her side, just because I

can't accept pettifogging disagreeables for any one I like in a patient spirit. Alice has discovered that 'prudent, cautious self-control is wisdom's root!' What an unreasonable idiot every one would consider me for not being perfectly well satisfied with her!"

Annie is put to the test as to her power of suppressing all show of feeling that is not absolutely kind about Alice rather sooner than she has anticipated. It is a sultry, sleepy afternoon, and Annie makes the state of the atmosphere the excuse for staying at home, and lounging about in a loose white robe from shady drawing-room to shadier conservatory during those hot hours, between four and seven, which she generally spends in the drive or the Row. She tells herself that the feeling of depression, which is her portion just now, is due solely to the state of the atmosphere, and that it is her duty to try and renovate her system by a little rest. At night a dinner-

party and two or three parties to follow will carry her out of herself, and engulf her in the vortex whose misnomer is pleasure. "But, just for the afternoon, I'll have myself to myself," she says, and she tries to persuade herself that the wish is an expression of genuine feeling.

By-and-by, as little paroxysms of impatience assail her, she does admit that another hope than the one of obtaining rest has chained her to the house to-day. "I shouldn't have been justified in going out after what I said to mamma, for she is sure to prompt Mr. Cairn to call at once," she says aloud to herself; and all the while her heart throbs with impatience for some one else to call and tell her—what?

Ay, what? for does she not know the story of Rowley's ruin by heart already? It is not for a repetition of that she yearns. Nor has she any morbid curiosity as to the way in which his father's madness has manifested itself. Nor does she pine to

hear that his mother and sisters have borne the push from their pinnacle with equanimity! What she does pant to know is how Rowley stands it himself, and whether or not Alice's strained and sifted sympathy is enough for him.

"He won't come here, though. Why should he? He has Alice to go to for astringent advice as to the way in which it behoves him to grub on in the manliest and most uncomplaining manner for the future," she says, as she cast herself down on a sofa in the coolest corner of the room, with a book in her hand, to the task of reading and understanding which she means to nail herself until it is time to dress for dinner.

It is no trivial task this which she has undertaken. The lines are blurred with the name of "Rowley;" for his misfortunes are very paramount with her now, and Annie belongs to that rather rare order of womankind who worship success in the abstract, but invariably find themselves

giving the best energies of their hearts and souls to the cause of the unsuccessful. She has, however, just mastered the meaning of the special instalment of the author who appeals to her at this unpropitious hour, when a more untoward visitor is heralded by a resonant knock.

"It is Cairn, and I will remember that mamma is popularly supposed to have arrived at years of discretion," she is saying to herself, when the door opens, and the one whom she does not dare to expect, for whose presence she does not dare openly to hope, comes in.

That she is very near to him, that the sympathy she has not ventured to proffer to him, are both prized and appreciated and taken for granted by him, is evident from his first words. She has risen with a warm welcome in her outstretched hand, and in the smile that is valiantly doing battle with the tears, but she cannot speak ; for she dare not say what is in her heart,

and Rowley has not given her an artificial cue yet.

"Do you remember that line in the 'Lay of Marston Moor'—

'I come to thee a landless man'?"

he asks, with a forced smile. "I come singing that *refrain* to you now."

"Yes, I remember the whole lay, and especially I remember the verse from which you quote," she says quietly; but she is palpitating all over as she speaks. Rowley has quoted half the line only; it runs thus:

"I come to thee a landless man, my fond and
faithful wife!"

Why does Rowley dare so much and not dare more? she asks herself. Why make the position of Sir Nicholas, on his return from Marston Moor, a parallel case with his own, if he may not dare to cast her for the part of Sir Nicholas's wife? "That is reserved for Alice, of course," she

says to herself, "but he might spare me the trouble of rehearsing bits of the drama."

"Well, Annie, to drop poetry and come back to the prose which must be my portion for the remainder of my life, I come to you in a very bad case, even when the best is made of it! You have heard it all from Isabel, I know. You have heard that our fortune has been a mere flash in the pan?"

He seats himself by her side as he says this, and the human impulse to give him such promise of comradeship and kindly feeling as may be given in the clasp of a hand is upon her.

"Rowley," she says, putting her slender, nervous little hand in his, "all I have heard from Isabel is that 'the days are dark, and that Rowley will tell me what has darkened them;' but from Alice Adair I have heard to-day that it is ruin?"

"It *is* ruin," he says coolly; "but, as I am told by some of my iron-clad friends, it's

not ruin that I am justified in lamenting, because not only was I not accessory to the cause of it, but I have the means in my brains and health of obviating the harshest of its effects from my poor mother and sisters."

"Ah! yes; there's great comfort in that reflection, of course," Annie says thoughtfully, and her hand quivers into closer sympathy with his for a moment, before she releases it and adds—

"But, Rowley, condemn me and despise me for my narrow-heartedness as much as you please; *all* my pain is for you. I knew you and cared for you first, you see; do forgive me."

If she were a penitent confessing a crime she could not look more piteously, beseechingly penitential than she does now in the eyes of this man, as she confesses her absorbing, overpowering interest in him.

"*Forgive* you for being the first to let a gleam of light in upon my darkened life?"

Rowley says, with emotion. "It's something very much stronger than 'forgiveness' that I feel for you, Annie—but I have no right to tell you so?"

He is thinking of his circumstances as he speaks; she is thinking of Alice, the girl who is so resigned to them.

"No, of course we have no right to speak about anything to each other that we wouldn't each speak to the whole world about—that's understood. Yes, though there is one topic that you couldn't discuss so freely with any one else perhaps, and that is—Alice! How strong she is! It was from her I heard to-day of your reverses—that you are utterly ruined. She was brave to tell it all to me, and very brave to tell it as she did."

Annie tries hard to speak in a form of words that shall sound laudatory of Alice, but though the words are all right, there is something that is not quite laudatory in the tone.

"You see," Rowley replies, "Alice Adair is not called upon to be either brave or cowardly on my sisters' behalf. They are old friends, and I am sure she was pleased when prosperity came to them ; but she is so accustomed to adversity herself that she has lost the fine taste for the bitterness of it which characterizes you, for instance."

"I don't fancy that I was thinking so much of what she is called to be on your sisters' behalf. I had you in my mind more to-day, when I was hearing the story, and I thought that if she had broken down I shouldn't have been surprised. As it was, I admired and respected her immensely, and had the conclusion forced upon me that she will be a real helpmate to—the man she marries ; he will never dare to faint by the wayside, or venture to find the sun too hot or the blast too bitter for him to get through his daily tale of bricks."

"Why are we talking of her the whole time ?" is Rowley's irrelevant rejoinder.

“ Because—oh, don’t you see ?—because I feel how badly I play the part of guide, philosopher, and friend to you after her. She would have done you good by this time, if you had gone to her instead of coming to me ; she would have told you what you ought to do and how you ought to do it, whereas I do nothing but show you that my heart is aching for you.”

Her voice sinks to a whisper in the last sentence, for verily Annie’s heart is aching for this man, and in the depths of it she is conscious that she is not the really valuable aid to him, the genuine incentive, the moral quinine, which Alice Adair can be. Already she sees in a glass darkly, and sadly recognizes the fact that Alice is the woman to have boiling water and wholesome, cleanly potato peelings ready for the “ bread-winner ” when he comes home worn out ; while she (Annie) is the woman to forget to boil the water, and prepare the potatoes, the while she is engaged in

earnest and heartfelt lamentations over her inability to cool his parched palate with iced hock, and tempt his exhausted appetite with salads greenly gleaming through a creamy veil of *mayonnaise*. The difference between the two women is, that Alice will always seem to think that whatever is, is best, for others as well as for herself; while Annie will not only suffer with the suffering of the "other," and sorrow for him, but will suffer and sorrow additionally on account of her own inability to lift the burden from him. The one is the woman to teach him how to steer, and to take the helm out of his hand and steer for him if he shows himself incapable. The other is the woman to so wind herself around that ball of selfishness, misnamed man's heart, as to check all reasonably acquired feeling it may ever have had for her rival, without nurturing the spontaneous growth that is in it for herself.

There is silence between them for a few

moments, after she has told him that her "heart is aching for him," and that she can do neither more nor less than show him that such is the case. Then he speaks—

"If I were still heir to something more than an empty title, your words would make me the happiest man in England ; as it is they only point my powerlessness, and teach me the lesson that a man who is in the chains of the most abject of all slavery, poverty, is not justified in either showing feeling or exciting it."

"Not when this feeling is one of friendship that will endure whatever happens ?" she asks, in a low voice.

"Is it only friendship ?" he asks significantly ; and Annie remembers all the barriers that fate and fortune have erected between Rowley and herself, and answers—

"You are not justified in asking that question, Rowley. At any rate, if it is not the real thing, it is such a perfect imitation of it that it will wear equally well."

"Will it stand the soul-subduing monotony of seeing its object plodding on in the patient, uninteresting spirit that is born of the knowledge that he will have so to plod to the end?"

Her face flushes and her eyes flash.

"No, it can't do that," she says frankly; "it would lose all sympathy with a mere plodder. But you'll never be that, Rowley."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT.

ANNIE is sitting reading in her boudoir in the lazy heat of the noontide hour, a few days after this, when Miss Adair is announced, and with a little premonitory self-condemnatory twinge of conscience, the elder lady rises to receive her guest.

“ You’re come to revile me for not having called upon you for a drive for nearly a week,” she begins hurriedly ; “ but the truth is, I have been engrossed in freeing myself from a coil which mamma wound round me by a mistake. Worry of any kind always makes me ill and anxious to avoid my fellow-creatures.”

“How unfit you must still be to cope with real life, if that’s the case!” Alice replies. “I haven’t come to revile you about leaving me to my own devices, or indeed about anything ; I have only come to mention one or two facts to you that you ought to know, and then to leave it to your judgment and sense of justice to act upon them.”

“What an appallingly solemn prologue!” Annie says.

“I believe you mean, what a ridiculously solemn prologue,” Alice says quietly. “The whole case may appear insignificant in the last degree to you, but to me it is so serious and important. Lady Galton, I am not happy about my brother.”

“Unhappy about your brother ! Why ? He appeared to me to be the very embodiment of happiness and prosperity when I saw him last evening,” Annie says, striving to feel interested, and yet letting it appear to the keen-sighted Alice that a revelation

of Adair difficulties will be an intensely wearisome thing to her.

"His prosperity is a bubble which I dread to see burst at any moment, and his happiness is only found in your presence," Alice says, bringing out the last clause of her sentence with some slight hesitation. "Dear Lady Galton, I must bore you with a statement—a thing I know you hate to listen to—but I must try to make you hear it, for my brother's sake."

"Of course, if you wish to make it, I will hear it gladly for your sake," Annie says politely.

"I must ask you to hear some dull, commonplace, uninteresting details, in order that you may understand that I am not speaking for the mere sake of speaking. My father is a hard-working, poor country surgeon. He has been a hampered man all his married life, and, to my bitter grief I must tell you, my brothers have been anything but the aids they ought to

have been to him. But lenient judgment ought to be extended to them, even for this fault ; my father never had time to train and guide them, my poor mother never had the strength, and the consequence is that the boys drifted into bad habits more from ignorance of what is right, than from any love of doing wrong. Wallace, like the rest, has been a trouble to my father ; he has been the wildest of all the boys, and he's the dearest. This situation he holds now my father got for him with difficulty—with such difficulty that it very naturally appears to be a very grand and glorious thing in my father's eyes. It is a good thing for him. It is a capital start ; he may do so well, and be such a comfort to our parents, if he is not lifted out of his sphere, and rendered extravagant and discontented by the examples and lives of others."

She pauses, and looks her listener eagerly in the face. Annie meets the gaze quite calmly and unconcernedly, and replies—

"My dear Alice, you can't isolate him, or blind him to the lavishness and splendour of rich people's lives."

"No, Lady Galton; I am not foolish enough to think I can do either, or to wish to do either, for that matter. All I want to do is to get you to check a growing folly in him. You are very kind to him, you are a novel experience to him, and his head is a little turned by attention that cannot fail to be flattering, coming as it does from you; your kindness will cease to be kindness, if you continue it after I tell you that he is building presumptuous hopes upon it—hopes which you will never realize."

Alice's tone becomes almost stern as she says this; and Annie, in whose ears stern tones ring strangely, and to whom advice on any subject from any person is but just endurable, feels a mixture of amazement and indignation as she listens to them.

"I am to understand that you wish to

put me in the false position of noble-mindedly repressing admiration that has never been expressed, and rejecting love that has never been proffered? Really, Alice, I cannot emulate your spirit of conscientiousness and candour. It has never been a habit of mine to assume that a man is in love with me till he tells me so, and I must do your brother the justice of saying that he is sensible enough to offer up his devotion on a shrine where it is certain of being duly valued, namely, his own. Honestly, I like him, and take pleasure in his society and find amusement in his transparent vanity ; but I cannot think of him in the light you have put him in, and therefore cannot go out of my way to tell him that it is an unbecoming one."

Annie says all this with an amount of resolution, and an air of conviction of being quite in the right, which she is very far from feeling. It has been an agreeable pastime to her to win as much of Wallace's

liking as he can express without permitting it to pass the line which divides liking from love. She knows herself (and censures herself for it) that she has an inordinate appetite for that species of regard which just hovers on that narrow border-line. But severely as she censures herself, and firmly as she perpetually resolves, when out of the presence of temptation, that she will not, when led into it again, exercise her winning power, she knows that the occasions on which she can plead "not guilty" are very rare, and that Wallace Adair has not furnished one of them. Nevertheless, well-inclined as she is to blame herself a little, and ready as she is to admit to herself that if Wallace had not become interested in her, it would have been no fault of hers, she is not well-inclined to listen to Alice's veiled reproof, or to admit that young lady's right to define her course of conduct.

"Don't be annoyed with me," Alice pleads. "Wallace is so much to me—I feel

that so much of our home happiness depends upon his going on quietly and well now that he has got the start—that I am apt to forget that he is not as important to other people as he is to us. Besides, I mightn't have got so anxious about him as to have made the mistake I have to you, if it hadn't been for something Rowley said last night——”

“Yes?” Annie says, quickly and questioningly.

“It was a mere trifle, and perhaps I should be unwise to repeat it,” Alice says, shaking her head dubiously; and Lady Galton draws her slender figure up statelily, and says incisively—

“Then you were unwise to mention it at all. You leave me the doubt now that must be infinitely painful to any woman who has been friendly with him—the doubt of Rowley's loyalty. If he had said anything kind of me, or tolerant to me, you wouldn't hesitate to repeat it.”

"Ah! Lady Galton, you know how to make me speak; you know that I would say anything and risk anything rather than let Rowley stand suspected of anything but the most perfect faith towards you. What he said was this: 'Wallace hasn't taken the old story of the moon and the brooks to heart; he will have only himself to thank if, when it ceases to shine, he finds his spring parched up, and his life's channel a dry and rugged one.'"

"And what might he mean by all that?"

"That you have shone so brightly on Wallace that, when you withdraw your light—as you will—he will be left in outer darkness."

"I suppose Rowley and you understand each other," Annie says, laughing lightly. "As for me, I acknowledge that I am always very much at sea if I find myself in the middle of a metaphorical conversation. Tell me, in plain English, what I am to do and leave undone with regard to your

brother Wallace, and I will try to meet your views."

"As if I could dictate a line of conduct to you!"

"My dear Alice, don't shrink from the task of being definite. You have already indefinitely rebuked and vaguely counselled me; moreover, I think you are just a little bit fond of dictating lines of conduct to weaker vessels."

"You think me priggish and conceited, and ignorant of the conventional sentiment which assumes that a married woman must know better about everything than an unmarried one," Alice says, in a mortified tone.

"Oh no, I don't go so far as that," Annie replies, in the temperate tone which is so unfailingly annoying when the subject about which it is employed is a torrid one; "but I do think that your judgment and your influence have been the strongest powers in your family circle for so long a

time that you dread their becoming weak and emaciated, unless you give them plenty of exercise now that you have come out of the family circle. However, to our point; I have said that I will do as you wish, if you will only word your wishes plainly. What do you want me to do ? ”

“ Wake Wallace from his dream, and teach him to look facts in the face ! His love for you will do him no good, for you will never return it.”

“ Oh, dear ! ” Annie says impatiently, “ what a dreadful thing it is that people will always force conclusions upon luckless wretches like myself, who in good faith only ask that fellow-travellers along the road will make the journey as pleasant as possible to one another ! Why, because one chances to be a man and the other a woman, may not two people be allowed to bask in the sunshine, and loiter over the sward, and pick the flowers, ay, and put aside the brambles of life for each other, if

possible, without their respective friends and acquaintances thinking of love and marriage for them? And the suggestion that mars the harmony and puts everything out of tune almost invariably comes from the most modest, wise, and discreet of our own friends."

She speaks in a genuinely vexed and earnest tone, and Alice is in the supremely unpleasant position of one who has gone out to wage war and do doughty deeds against an evil that does not exist. "I have spoken prematurely, and aroused her antagonism," the girl tells herself sadly. "It's wonderful how tenaciously these gentle-toned yielding women stick to their own courses when the slightest opposition is offered them; they teach us to think that they will surrender with discretion at the first word of wholesome warning, but the instant the warning is given they are on their mettle to disregard it, and defy the consequences from which it would protect them."

"You're moralizing to yourself," Annie says, coming back to her normal state of careless amiability at this juncture. "That's a waste of wisdom, but still it is a more agreeable habit than that of moralizing to other people. After all, you haven't told me what I ought to do, or, rather, what you want me to do."

"My telling you will be a waste of words."

"Indeed not, unless you counsel an uncourteous course. I am incapable of being uncivil to any one, more especially to any one I like; but anything short of uncivil, I'll be at your behest."

"Then, for his sake, and for the object of bringing him to his senses, advise Wallace not to come to your house so much. Let him learn to depend more upon other people for his relaxation, and not fancy that he finds it only in your society."

Annie colours as she listens, but commands her sorely tried temper as only a

gentlewoman tutored by the world can command it.

“You speak plainly, indeed, Alice,” she says quietly. “Shall I try to rival you in being lucid? Supposing I do as you bid me, do you know what the consequences will be? Your brother, for whose welfare you are so affectionately anxious, will seek the relaxation and excitement of music halls and low company. If you think these will be less deleterious to him than the present habit of seeking my house and my society in his leisure moments—good, I will give him his *congé*.”

She almost pants with anger as she speaks, though she never raises that soft voice of hers, that is so full of subtly sweet inflections. She almost pants with anger; and this not because it costs her a pang to part herself from the flattering companionship of a man whose flattery, after all, only consists in this, that he relies upon her utterly, but because she cannot endure to

have her ways ordered for her. To be pruned by prudence, to be trammelled by other people's tact, or want of it—these are indeed hard lines for Annie, whose soul is a real bird of freedom, unable to sing or speak at the word of command.

“And Wallace will find out that I have spoken, and will hate me for interference,” Alice says, almost crying. “No, Lady Galton, I withdraw everything I have said, for you have misinterpreted or misunderstood the spirit in which I have said it; only, don't give my brother an excuse for being more reckless by-and-by than he has been hitherto. I leave him in your hands, for I see that you can and will mould him as you please.”

The girl is in such simple earnest, for her heart is full of forebodings, that Annie cannot help being impressed. “When you speak in that way you can mould me as you please,” she says tenderly. “Alice, haven't you learnt *yet* that my surface-

seeming is the worst thing about me? In reality, I am not greedy of that sort of devoted attention which is miscalled admiration—at least I don't think I am; that is to say, I don't misunderstand it and overrate it, but *I take it.*"

"And enjoy it?"

"Yes, and enjoy it! Why not? Is there so much joy in life that we should spend our whole time in analyzing the feeling that causes it when it does come to us, and putting it apart from us, unless its motive may be cried aloud in the market-place? But look here, Alice; though I resent the construction you have put upon my conduct, I'll cease from it because—well, because I've made up my mind that I won't oppose you in anything, or seem to thwart you. No, don't thank me; it's not altogether for your sake that I say this. But listen to me. I'll go away from London without beat of drum; not one of you—not even Rowley—shall know where I

am; and as absence always makes the heart grow fonder—*of somebody else*, your brother Wallace will have found some other pastime than my presence by the time I come back again.”

She ceases speaking with a little gulp, for this renunciation costs her something of which Alice hardly wots. In leaving London now, Annie feels that she is leaving Rowley for ever. “If I go away with the idea of carrying out Alice Adair’s wishes, I must stay away (to complete my work) for a long long time, and where is the friend who can stand the test of non-intercourse? Probably, when I come back, Rowley will have come to regard a humdrum domestic existence with a wife who will never be weakly ambitious, or weakly full of repining for him, as the real enviable lot. And he has been my hero for so long a time! After all, it is best that I should go and one excuse for going is as good as another; therefore, at Alice’s bidding, for

her brother's good, I'll depart without sounding the note of departure, and I'll leave no trace behind me."

There is no one to whom this young, pretty, attractive, loving-hearted woman feels her presence here to be needful or beneficial. Alice Adair is engrossed openly by her fraternal duties and anxieties, and secretly (Lady Galton believes) by her unavowed bond with Rowley. Wallace, his sister has plainly told her, will do better out of her soft, sweet, soothing atmosphere than in it. Albert is in the swing of money-making success by day, and in the society of money-seeking mothers and daughters by night. And Rowley has his work and his home anxieties, and the support of Alice Adair to fall back upon when either the work or the anxieties bear too hardly upon him. As for Mrs. Fane, since the truth has been elicited that Mr. Cairn had asked for her intervention with her daughter, instead of her daughter's inter-

vention, with the mother, the latter has eschewed the society of her child. Altogether Annie is justified in feeling that she is not needful to any one, and that she will be leaving no duty unfulfilled and neglecting no responsibility in exiling herself from all of them, till such time as they have learnt to feel they cannot do without her, or she has taught herself to do happily without them.

CHAPTER VII.

"I HAVE DONE IT!"

"SHE had no right to ask me to do it; she had no right to accept such a sacrifice from me; but as she has asked me, and has accepted the sacrifice, I'll 'go away, though it's for Rowley I'm fleeing, not from Wallace Adair."

Annie Galton says this to herself just after Alice has departed, having succeeded beyond her fondest imaginings on behalf of her brother. Annie is in a state of freshest revolt against the order of things which has placed this young inexperienced girl in the position of her (Annie's) judge and executioner. Still, as

she has been called upon to do something definitely disagreeable in a small way for the good of another, she is resolved to do it in a large way for the good of herself. The key-note of the motive which actuates her is struck in these words of hers: "It's for Rowley I am fleeing, not from Wallace Adair."

Ardently as Lady Galton desires to think well and highly of the girl who is "to be Rowley's wife," as she always phrases it, she cannot help feeling on this occasion that Alice has acted with a little guile and a good deal of subtlety towards herself. "She has used her brother as a blind to her real purpose, which is to cut me off from Rowley altogether, and it's mean of her," Lady Galton tells herself, with momentary indignation. Then she cools herself down into reasonableness again with the timely reflection that, after all, if things are as she nominally always insists on their being between Rowley and Alice, then is

the latter justified in desiring to check the growth of any other woman's influence over him, even though that other be the widow of his cousin, the friend of his youth.

Annie Galton is a woman who is prompt in coming to a decision, and even more prompt, if possible, in carrying that decision out. She is not one of those who suffer their feet to become entangled in little obstacles, and who allow their progress along the path they desire to tread to be continually checked by puny barriers. She has just settled herself comfortably in a new house, and has begun to grow into the habit of it. She has just drawn around her a circle of friends who are congenial, at any rate, if not dear to her. She has arranged her establishment and settled her plans for a prolonged campaign in London. And just as she has done these things Alice Adair has pointed out to her that it is expedient that she should mar these plans, upset these arrange-

ments, break the circle of friends, leave everything that is pleasant in her present life, and go into new grooves, for the sake of educating Wallace Adair gently in that grand lesson of disappointment which all of us have to learn sooner or later!

There is a good deal of gloom in her soul as she comes to this conclusion that she will go away from them all, into some solitude whither they shall not be able to trace her, and she does not for a moment seek to delude herself with the idea that it is on Albert's account that she feels it. He has expostulated with her about her intention, and rather indifferently assured her that he "shall not know what to do without her." But dearly as Annie loves her brother, she gauges him thoroughly, and she knows that all his interest is centred in making money, and that what he has of heart is given to Alice Adair.

"You're such a capricious creature, Annie," her brother says to her, for she

tells him of her going without giving him any reason for it. "I believe you'd like to try poverty and pauper diet for a change."

"Whether I have an inherent love of change in me or not, I feel the great need of it now. We have had a good many shocks in our family, you must remember, Albert: the death of my husband and his sons, and since then Sir Oliver's madness and Rowley's misfortunes. All these things have tried me a good deal, and I feel that if I am ever to have any zest in what is going on again, I must revolutionize my life completely."

"Well, you know your own business best, I suppose," her brother says; and then he hazards a hope that she will quarter herself within an accessible distance of town, in order that he may sometimes run down to her from Saturday till Monday.

"When I'm settled I'll tell you where I am," she says, "on condition that you keep my address to yourself. I don't want any

of the people who are about me now to be dropping in on me, and robbing the new life I am going to try of all its freshness."

"Something has gone wrong with you, Annie?" her brother says affectionately. "However, it's not my business to pry into yours. Cut yourself off from all the rest, if you like, dear, but don't try to leave me in the lurch."

"I wouldn't do that for worlds. I have made arrangements for you to go on living here until you want an establishment of your own; and, Albert, I hope that time isn't far off. You ought to marry."

"Ah! well, I shall think about that in time too, I suppose," he says laughing, and his sister knows that he is thinking of Alice Adair when he adds, "By the way, wouldn't it be pleasant for you to have a young lady friend with you in the country? You'll find the evenings very slow, for I suppose you won't go in for country town gaiety or county visiting at all, and how-

ever successfully you may ride and drive away the hours of the day, you'll find the evenings slow."

"Defend me from young lady friends under any circumstances, but especially in the country, where we should be cast on one another," she says quickly. "No, Albert; leave me to test the plan I've made in my own way. When it falls upon me I can come back; I am only self-exiled, you know."

"I was thinking," he says, sticking to his own idea, and disregarding her aversion to it, after the manner of a man—"I was thinking that you might find it pleasant to have Miss Adair with you?"

"Thank you, I should find it hateful."

"Really! Well, she's an astonishingly nice girl, and as we are speaking about her I'll tell you this, Annie, that I think Rowley's conduct to her is very bad."

"Why say this to me?"

"Because a word or two from you to

Rowley might clear up the matter. Rowley and I are old friends and tremendous chums and companions, yet he's as close as wax on the subject. He speaks very highly of her, if you mention her to him, but seems to ignore having any special claim to or interest in her at all; and, on the other hand, she doesn't know, it seems to me, whether she's on with him or off with him."

"If I were in that doubt about a man for one moment, I should most certainly be 'off with him' the next. Miss Adair is greatly gifted with humility and patience."

"Miss Adair is greatly gifted with every virtue that a woman ought to possess, I think," Albert says, firing up at the implication cast on the womanly dignity of his current idol.

"It may be so, Albert," Annie says carelessly. "I, for one, am willing, and have shown myself willing, to accredit her with every good quality that she has been pro-

claimed to possess. Certainly, if she means to marry Rowley now, she is gifted with a vast amount of womanly want of consideration. A marriage with a penniless girl like Alice Adair would mean for Rowley the most hopeless, overwhelming poverty. Is it not enough that he should have to bear the burden which has been laid upon him by fate and his family, without this girl striving to sink him lower, with her selfish fidelity and egotistical determination, not only to brave any fortune with him, but to bravely bear the sight of that fortune being as sordid and bad for him as it's possible to be ? ”

She speaks quickly and warmly, and for a moment he regards her wonderingly. Then a smile of enlightenment comes into his eyes, and he says, “You wouldn’t speak so harshly of her, poor girl, if you didn’t feel that, if it were not for her, you might be able to better Rowley’s fate.”

“Ah ! how you mistake me ! ” she says,

with quick impatience. "Call me jealous of her if you will—I am only a woman, and not at all meanly endowed with the prevailing characteristic of humanity; but I am not idiotic enough to fancy that I could in any way better Rowley's fortune, even if Alice didn't exist. I care for him too much to go to him empty-handed; it would hurt me horribly to see any idol I had erected ground down by poverty, to which I added, and from which I was powerless to free him. I have no feeling but contempt for the woman who, blinded by the passion of the hour, or eager to attain the honourable estate of matrimony at any price, clings tenaciously to an engagement or an 'understanding' with a ruined man, and forces him to feel that his honour is forfeited, and his integrity blurred, if he does not perfect his ruin by marrying her."

"We think very little of a girl who throws a fellow over when his fortunes fail him," Albert says doubtfully.

"That's because you're in the bonds of tradition—of romantic, poetical, twaddling tradition, which tries to teach the silly lesson of love in a cottage and a meal of herbs being sufficient entertainment for a man from the moment he leads his bride from the altar. You see I dare to censure Alice—if she is holding Rowley still—because I am so placed that I can never marry him or any other poor man. I can't be misunderstood by any one possessing a grain of common sense, even if, for the sake of argument, I grant the supposition that I have cared and do care for Rowley; but the idea of wretched, sordid, ugly domestic poverty for Rowley is odious to me."

"You don't seem to have much feeling for what *she* might suffer," Albert says reproachfully.

"My dear Albert, she is one of those superior beings who have no extravagant tastes, and who can do without things cheerfully. If she marries Rowley, she will

only have to go on doing as she has been doing all her life; whereas Rowley will have to renounce the society of men and women whose society has become more essential to him than his daily bread."

"And why renounce it, if he marries a girl of whom he may well be proud?"

"Because he is a gentleman," Annie says emphatically, "and he will not be eager to show the girl of whom he 'may well be proud' in dowdy attire, and harrassed out of pleasantness by the fatigue and anxiety she has undergone in rendering herself and her house as presentable even as they are."

"I don't see, even if a woman has to draw the strings of her purse rather tightly, why her attire should be 'dowdy,'" Albert says insinuatingly.

"Shall I try to teach you, Albert? The reason why is clear enough. Every woman must look 'dowdyish' if her dress is of poor material, badly cut, and the tightly drawn purse-strings can never expand to

the purchase of anything else. I admit that Alice will always be neat and cheerful, and perfectly satisfied to see herself in a scrupulously clean cotton gown, and her husband in a suit that he has got cheap from Moses and Sons'; but I ask you, is that a future which can be calmly contemplated for Rowley and for Rowley's wife?"

"Anyway, I'll try to save Alice Adair from it," Albert says, rising up, and bending over to kiss his sister and say good-night to her. "You have proved to me that there would be something the reverse of dishonourable in her making an end of it, whatever 'it' may be between them; if I can persuade her to do it I will, for the girl is a diamond."

"You mean that you will ask her to be your wife?"

"Yes, by Jove! I will," he says heartily. "I don't care a straw about her having loved Rowley—any other girl would have

been sure to have cared for some other fellow, or a few other fellows—I'll win her if I can ; and you'll say I'm right, Annie ? "

"Has anything I've said caused you to come to this decision ?" Annie asks, looking rather frightened.

"Yes, of course it has," he says gratefully, and Annie gives a little despairing groan.

"I have done it !" she mutters to herself ; and after Albert leaves her, she goes to her own room with the miserable doubt assailing her as to whether or not she has done well.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE COMMON.

"I AM full of work; pupils seem to multiply and increase upon me without any effort on my part," Rowley writes to Isabel about this time, "and the affairs of the estate are clearing themselves. I find that there is a bit of the property, acquired by the late Sir Rowley and not entailed, that I can sell. A high bid is made for it through a legal firm with whom my own lawyer has dealings, and when my powers as absolute ruler over the property, even during my father's lifetime, are clearly defined and ascertained, I shall realize this portion of the estate, and

begin to clear the remainder. Do you know the place? It lies about five miles from Galtonswear. The property is called Henge, and there is a tenement on it (merely a rude farmhouse, I fancy), which is described in the lease as Hengeholme. At present this is occupied by the widow and family of a Mr. Norris, who has farmed the place splendidly for some years, and brought it into a high state of cultivation. I wish you would go over and have a look at it. It strikes me that, if it is habitable and pleasant, we may as well—if I fail in selling it—make it the family headquarters, and let Galtonswear, till we see a little more light in our financial darkness.

“I wish you would fix a time for Alice Adair to visit you. I don’t like to move in the matter for divers reasons—the least of which is the fear of compromising myself. But I think she expects to be asked to stay with you, and I know she would be glad to go.

“ I don’t see much of the dowager in these days ; but don’t you imagine from my saying this, that she gives me the cold shoulder since my misfortunes. If she could impart a little of her womanly warmth to Alice Adair, the latter would be materially improved by it. I can’t help feeling that Alice has been rather spoilt by having been made the family mentor and prop. She has got into such a confirmed habit of nerving nerveless people, that she is rather apt to treat us all as if we were suffering from emaciated wills and want of purpose. Just the sort of woman ‘to warn, to suffer, and command,’ but not exactly the sort of woman a fellow fresh from a failure, or one recently flagellated for a fault, would care to come across. Let me hear your verdict on Hengeholme. I am sanguine about selling it, but one never knows what may turn up. Keep me *au courant* with my father’s state ; the slightest increase of mania will demand different supervision,

and my poor mother will have to make up her mind to the separation. If any of you suffer through my weak acquiescence in her desire to keep my father at home, it will be an awful source of self-reproach to me. I rely on you to give me the fullest information, painful as it may be to you to do anything that may compel me to run counter to my mother's wishes."

The two Miss Galtons are together when Isabel receives this letter from Rowley, and as their mother is not present, she reads sundry passages aloud to her sister, and they comment on them together.

"The days are so dreadfully dull," Grace says, "that even the thought of making an unpleasant and fatiguing pilgrimage to this place is better than nothing. Let us plan how we can get over there, Isabel; I've been chained to the Galtonswear grounds so long that I know every inch of them, and hate as well as I know them."

"How delighted we were with the grounds when we came here first, and contrasted them with the weedy, arid Coulthurst gardens!" Isabel says. "Dear me! it seems now as if we were ungratefully glad to get away from Coulthurst, where at least we never knew any great sorrow."

"Nor, for the matter of that, did we know any great joy there either," Grace says; "and of course we were delighted with these grounds, when we came here first and found them a paradise of flowers, under the care of an army of gardeners. Now all the flowers are dead, and the gardeners are gone, and the whole place is redolent of ruin and sure dull decay. It is horrible! I don't care how impatient and discontented you think me, but I will tell you that I won't stand it much longer. If no 'true love comes riding by' and picks me up on his way, I'll go out and take a governess's place and see what I can do for myself. It's a shame of Rowley to

condemn us to this place, where we have no chance of settling ourselves."

"He does it for the best," Isabel pleads. "Think how he works and endures, poor boy! and don't blame him for striving to keep his sisters from the rough usage of the world."

"I'd rather endure 'rough usage' from the world than live in an enchanted palace of penury," Grace replies; "and as for Rowley 'doing it for the best,' so did papa, when he made ducks and drakes of the property. I would rather that the intentions of the male members of my family were less excellent, and their practice a little pleasanter."

"Grumbling won't mend matters, Grace."

"No; neither will sitting down supinely, and smiling seraphically at the iron bars of our poverty, melt them away. I've no sympathy with Rowley's pretentious pride in pretending to 'keep up our position,' now that we no longer have a position to

keep up, or a farthing to bless ourselves with. Rowley won't hear of my trying the stage, or of my pursuing the safer and more humdrum paths of teaching. What is there left for us but marriage? and we never see a man!"

"I don't like to hear you talk in such a way," the elder sister says.

"And I don't like being forced to feel in such a way; feeling it, I may as well express it," Grace retorts. "Do look facts in the face, Isabel. If Rowley dies or marries—and, being mortal, he's liable to do either at any moment—where shall we be, and what shall we be? A couple of helpless, haggard, homeless old maids! It's an awful fate to contemplate. I declare I'd gladly marry a second edition of Blue Beard himself to avert it."

"As you can't advertize that fact in the columns of the daily papers, it's no use your proclaiming it at home," Isabel says calmly; and Grace shrugs her shoulders impatiently as she answers—

"No one knows the futility of it better than I do, but just to-day I am so angry with both Rowley and the dowager, that I am disposed to beat my head against stone walls in sheer despair. Rowley said Annie was going to invite me to stay with her weeks ago; it's like her selfishness not to have done it."

"I don't flatter and laud Annie as you do, but I don't think selfishness is her besetting sin," Isabel says.

"No; but intense love of the liking of all men is," Grace replies. "I suppose she doesn't want me to go up and see her letting any number of men languish in the chains of what she calls friendship."

"I think it's more than probable that she is as great a flirt even as yourself," Isabel says; "but I'm sure she isn't selfish, even in her flirtations. It isn't in her to grudge anything to anybody."

"Excepting a lover to a woman," Grace interrupts with a laugh. "And the worst of

it is that she would do it so gracefully that no one but the unhappy woman herself would know—and she wouldn't feel sure—that her ladyship was intervening; and she just does it with a word or two, and a look that the sternest moralist couldn't construe into anything but 'friendship,' if they're strictly analyzed. I saw her with Rowley, remember."

"And so did I!"

"Yes, but you always see without perceiving. She said the sweetest things of Alice always, but the very fact of her speaking of Alice at all, when she didn't know her, taught Rowley the tender truth that he was paramount with her. I'm ready to believe her to be all that's generous and guileless and good, but, at the same time, I trust she will never cross the path of any man who may ever care for me."

"She may win the temporary liking of Rowley and other men, but Alice is the one to win their lasting regard," Isabel

says, with a firm belief in the infallibility of her old friend that her shrewder sister finds very amusing.

“All that talk about ‘lasting regard’ is mere verbiage,” Grace says contemptuously; “it’s in the nature of all things mundane to change, and why should ‘regard’ or ‘love’ be exceptions to the rule? Why, love is built on such a shallow foundation, almost invariably, that it can’t be lasting; and, as Annie would say herself, ‘What a nuisance if it were!’ Fancy always being in a state of mental and moral turmoil, because of some possible meeting or probable separation. If it comes well within the bounds of a man’s convenience to marry a girl with whom he has once been in love, people purr complacently over his fidelity, and declare that, like the bard in Taanhäuser, ‘he has kept his passion purely,’ simply because it suits his own ends. No, there’s no glamour over love for me.”

As she speaks, she remember a day when

Wallace Adair had thrown something like a glamour over the subject for her. She remembers also how, while the glamour lasted, she had grown jealous of a bonnie-looking girl, the daughter of a gamekeeper, and so there is more than a *souçon* of bitterness in the tone in which she enunciates the sentiment.

"There's an affectation of worldly wisdom in what you say, dear," her sister says affectionately; "happily I, who know you, know that it is only affectation. But we'll give up what you sensibly called 'idle verbiage,' and just mature our plan for getting to Hengeholme before we place it before mamma. At any rate, it will be an outing. It's only five miles; why shouldn't we walk?"

"Why should we, when I can borrow Atwood's pony?" Grace rejoins.

Now, Atwood is the Galtonswear baker, and his pony is his mainstay and prop. Without his pony Atwood is, so to say, a

lost man, for the loaves grow stale before his feather-headed and leaden-footed boys can deliver them. It is characteristic of Grace that she mentally confiscates this pony to her own use, without a thought of the inconvenience that must arise to the owner by her free use of it. Grace is an adept in the grand old art practised so successfully by Border ruffians, expressed in the lines—

“They shall take who have the power,
And they shall keep who can.”

The youngest Miss Galton has taken with tact, and kept with tenacity, everything she desired, and of which she could conveniently lay hold, all through her life. That she has failed in gaining great things has been rather from want of opportunity than lack of either prowess or perseverance. And, as time strengthens these characteristics, we may hope before long to see her annexing something much more important and satisfactory than Atwood's pony.

However, at this juncture the pony being essential to her, she secures him for the following day, and arraying herself in a habit that fits her to perfection, and a hat that makes her pretty fair face look prettier and more piquant than it does beneath any other description of head-gear, she mounts one of the handsomest little ponies in the country. Delight in her own appearance, pleasure at being once again on horseback—the position of all others in which she looks at her best—and a general feeling of excitement about the novelty of the expedition, combine to render the girl radiant. The consideration that Isabel is going to toil along a dirty road, under a fiercely burning sun, on foot, does not cast the faintest shadow over Grace's sunny-heartedness.

"I do envy you one thing, and that is your strength and the perfect ease and grace with which you walk," she says to Isabel, when they have accomplished about

two miles of their distance. They have just reached the top of a long, steep hill, and have come out on an open, breezy, heath-covered common. The one girl in her exquisitely fitting London-made habit, well down in her saddle, and quite at one with her handsome little miniature steed, and the other in her brown-holland costume, walking along with free elastic tread and erect beautifully poised figure, make a charming picture. And so an artist thinks, who happens to be sitting sketching on a bank under an elm-tree, whose drooping branches throw him into shadow and conceal him from their sight.

“A young lady of some wealthy house, and a friend of humbler fortune, probably,” the artist thinks, as his gaze follows the pretty pair. “The girl on the pony looks like an illustration to one of Lever’s novels, and the other one is a perfect Du Maurier; I must manage to see them again.” Then he goes on with a bit of the common,

where some broom mingles with the purple heath, and forgets them in his ardour in the cause of "colour," as they go on to Hengeholme.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE BEST PARLOUR.

“A BLESSING from me on this alley of limes!” Grace exclaims, as they pass through a white gate, and, leaving the parched, glaring high-road behind, find themselves under the perfumed shade of the pale green leaves and yellow blossoms of an avenue of linden trees.

The handsome little pony has not turned a hair; for, out of consideration for the loneliness which would have been Isabel's portion, if Grace had indulged her longing for a canter over the many nice bits of turf they have passed in their progress thither, his rider has walked him the whole way.

That the rider is unflushed and unheated may be assumed. Did she feel either one or the other, she would coax her sister into climbing a hedge or a tree, and gathering the freshest leaves attainable, wherewith to fan the fair person of Miss Grace Galton. But poor Isabel feels flustered and flushed, fatigued and way-worn, to a pitiable degree, as, in obedience to Grace's mandate, she comes to a halt just outside the entrance-gates to Hengeholme.

If the approach is to be regarded as a criterion, then is Hengeholme a place well worth walking five miles to see. The alley of limes winds in a serpentine manner, in parallel lines with a river full of boulders and cascades, and reflections of brown mosses, green overhanging trees, and bits of sky as purely blue as if it were gleaming over some other land than England. Small wonder that the two girls loiter along this lovely alley, and half dread to

go on to the house, lest it should be modern, glaring, commonplace, disillusioning altogether.

But suddenly their fears cease, as an abrupt curve in the avenue brings them to the border of a smiling tract of turf and free-growing rose-bushes, in the midst of which a thatched house, with a clematis and jasmine-covered porch, rises picturesquely. A low verandah runs round three sides of Hengeholme, and its pillars are wreathed with roses of every hue, from deepest crimson to creamiest white. Diamond-paned windows flash out through a veil of tendrils and green leaves. A couple of peacocks are trailing their outspread tails over a velvet lawn; two or three handsome pointers and setters are stretched in a semi-slumberous state in the shade of the verandah; a gaudy macaw is bobbing up and down on a stand by the open front-door. Altogether, the air is redolent with sweetness, glowing with colour and

beauty—expressive, in every detail, of refinement and taste in those who inhabit it. The two Miss Galtons, who have come over with the unexpressed feeling that, in spite of all their reverses, they are the great ladies of the land, and that a visit from them, though unexpected and unsought, is an honour to the family of their brother's tenants, are so thrown out of gear by the general appearance of the exterior of Hengeholme that, if it were not for the absolute fatigue which Isabel feels, they would turn and go home again without delay. As it is, they trust to their innate tact to suggest some excuse for their appearance here that shall have an air of probability. And, conscious that delay will only add to the difficulties of the situation, Isabel, as usual, allows herself to be put forward by her sister when there is anything disagreeable to be done, and at the risk of getting a bite from the macaw, advances to the door, and commits

herself to whatever is to follow by knocking.

Presently along the hall, which runs through the house and opens into the high-walled fruit garden behind, there comes a young girl of fifteen or sixteen—a fresh-coloured, fine-limbed, high-couraged bright young creature, who looks them unflinchingly in the face, and shows no more embarrassment at confronting them than a colt would do if they had come across its paddock.

She stands silently at ease, looking at them approvingly, until Isabel gives their names, and explains their mission as best she can. That explanation over, the girl does away with the possibility of being suspected of ungraciousness or *gaucherie* at once, by saying—

“The Miss Galtons! the young ladies from Galtonsweir! Mother will be so glad to see you, for we’ve been told that the young master is going to turn us out,

and it's fretting her. Come into the best parlour, Miss Galton. Mr. Grainger is out sketching, and I'll take your pony round to the stables."

She opens a door as she speaks, introduces them to the best parlour, and then runs out to the pony, which they see her mount with the utmost *sang froid*, and start at a sharp trot in the direction in which they presume the stables to lie. During her absence the girls take a tour round the room, and discover that an artist is dwelling under the Hengeholme roof.

Floor, walls, and ceiling are all of oak, dark, polished, carved, and glistening with cleanliness. Along the high, narrow mantle-board a row of big blue-and-white Delft plates are ranged. There are open corner-cupboards in the room, and in each stand tall jars or vases of old Rouen ware, filled with gorgeous masses of red and cream-coloured roses. Larger jars full of the common red poppy stand about

on the floor. There are two or three easels in the room ; one supports a finished picture, the others hold canvases covered only as yet with faint suggestions and sketchy visions of beauty. The pretty house they are now in, bits of the boulder-broken, splashing river, and the bright, bold beauty of the ruddy-haired young girl who has admitted them, are all shadowed forth in various "studies" that are lying about. Grace glides round the room in tightly habited, elegant ease, and picks up and throws down sketch after sketch impatiently, in vain endeavour to find "something" that shall give her a clue to the *personnel* of the artist. Isabel, on the contrary, stands steadily before the easel that holds the finished picture, and sees, and desires to see, nothing but it.

It represents the junction of two streams—a rippling rivulet and broadly flowing river. The fairest hues in which earth, air, and sky, running water, and green trees

have ever been presented to us by Nature, have been caught and preserved here on this canvas which lies before her. Two figures break the perfect restfulness of the scene, but impart a vague dramatic excitement to it. They are the figures of a man and a girl. The man is unknown to her, and is endowed with the grace and beauty of a young Greek god. The girl has the rich physique, the ruddy hair, the dauntless expression, and the striking charm of the one who came to the door to meet them. To Isabel there is a sad significance in the picture; for the girl, as she gazes with wholesale trust and tenderness into her companion's face, is stepping from the quiet bank of the rivulet across to a perilous position on a boulder in the rushing river.

“It must be an illustration of—

‘When the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet,’”

Isabel says aloud, in pursuance of her own

train of thought; and before Grace can answer her, a quiet, widowed mother, and a bounding, bright-faced young daughter come into the room.

Mrs. Norris is perfectly mistress of herself, the situation, her sorrows, and the subject of the possible change to which she may have to submit. She looks upon these young ladies as the natural enemies of herself and her children, for a rumour has reached her to the effect that it is for his sisters' sake that Mr. Rowley Galton, the virtual owner of the Galtonsweir estate, is cutting down, and managing, and desiring to sell. Her heart has throbbed with a sort of exultant excitement at hearing that they are here—on her own ground! She has experienced a little of the savage delight one is apt to feel when some one we wish to hate does something that we are justified in mildly disliking. "They might have waited till I was gone, if I am to go; they needn't have come here to

crow over me so soon," she has been saying to herself, as she has come in from the garden to meet them. "Prying, odious impertinence, to have come in such a way, without knowing me, as if I were a game-keeper's widow, and should be smilingly grateful to them for their patronage. If the last Lady Galton had been in power still, there would have been no talk of my moving from Hengeholme while I could manage the land and pay my rent."

This being the phase of feeling in which Mrs. Norris enters the room, she is staggered at finding herself salved into serenity as soon as Isabel comes up to speak to her.

"We have taken the liberty that only country neighbours can take, Mrs. Norris, and have come to see you, waiving all ceremony about your never having been to see us. What a paradise of a place this is!"

"Yes, Miss Galton. And is it true that I am to be turned out of it?" Mrs.

Norris replies deliberately. "We hear all sorts of things said from those who seem to know what your brother's plans are, but I can't believe that he will treat me so scurvily, when it's my husband that made the place what it is."

"My brother has a terrible responsibility cast upon him," Isabel says, colouring a little. "If you knew him, you'd know that it isn't in him to treat any one 'scurvily,' Mrs. Norris. His power is a very painful thing to him, for he is forced to use it harshly sometimes, for the good of us all."

"Then it is true that he is going to sell this place over my head?" Mrs. Norris asks, with a quiver in her voice; and her daughter comes nearer and says—

"Never mind if he does; there are plenty of other places to go to, and plenty of other people to befriend us, as Mr. Grainger says."

"And who may this Mr. Grainger who makes such a safe prophecy be?" Grace

asks good-humouredly; and the girl she addresses, insensibly melted by the implied flattery in Grace's words, replies volubly—

“He's our lodger, Miss Galton; he's been here all the summer. He's an artist; these are all his pictures, and I wish he would come in while you're here.”

Grace smiles suavely. “I wish he would too, if he has anything more to show us that we can't see without him. What a lovely place to lodge in! What a lucky man to have discovered it, and to find people like you good enough to take him in!”

“I suppose you wouldn't care to go round our garden?”

“Wait till after dinner, Rhoda,” her mother interrupts, reprovingly. “The child doesn't know what it is to feel tired herself, Miss Galton, so you must excuse her. And you will stay and dine with me, won't you, and take a look round the place afterwards?”

"And perhaps Mr. Grainger will come in before you go," Rhoda puts in, encouragingly.

"At any rate, we will stay if you'll have us—won't we, Isabel?" Grace laughs graciously.

And, her invitation being accepted in this wise, Mrs. Norris gets herself away to her kitchen department, in order that she may qualify her household to do justice to that hospitable intent of hers, which has led her to take a step against which her pride, even more than her humility, revolts.

"Are you the only Miss Norris?" Isabel asks.

"Yes. I've two married sisters; they live quite near, and Mr. Grainger is always painting them and their children. He isn't like most people—he likes our red hair. My sisters have it just the same as me."

"It isn't red, it's glorious!" Isabel says warmly.

"That's what Mr. Grainger says. He says, 'It isn't red, it's Venetian.' I'm sure I don't know, but I always thought it hideous till he came."

"He has made a sketch of you here, I see," Grace says, going and standing in front of the picture which had enchained Isabel from the first. "It's a good likeness, too; a charming portrait of you, you lucky little girl. And who was his model for the young man who is helping you over the stones?"

"Himself."

"Oh!"

The one who has given this information, and the two who have listened to it, stand alike silently before the picture for a few moments after this. Then Grace turns away with a light laugh, and the whispered words—"An Antinous at large in a rural district! If the girl were prettier, I should be inclined to call Mrs. Norris an old goose—if he's half as good-looking as he

has represented himself to be. As it is, I wish he would come in." Then aloud she says—

"We are quite rested now, and I'm longing to see more of your lovely garden; What a gorgeous fellow your macaw is! He is quite in keeping with the place and the peacocks and dogs. It's the very prettiest farmhouse I ever saw or dreamt of. I don't wonder at an artist falling in love with it, and staying here."

"It wasn't quite so pretty when he came first—three years ago," Rhoda says, frankly. "He brought the macaw and the peacocks, and all this old china, and he always makes me keep everything filled with flowers."

"In fact, he is quite one of the family?" Grace remarks.

"Yes. Mother often says so."

"Has he taught you drawing?"

Rhoda shakes her head.

"No. I wouldn't care to learn. I like

to go out with him and watch him painting, but that's about all I care for it. He doesn't take me out half as much as he used," she adds, with a pout; and Grace says—

"Perhaps he thinks you ought to be better employed at home. What do you do with your time? As you're the only daughter *at* home, you must have plenty to do."

"I help about making the butter. Mr. Grainger painted me as 'Hetty in the Dairy' once. Hetty was a girl in some book that mother wouldn't let me read. It was such a pretty picture!"

They have strolled out into the garden by this time, and as Rhoda has levied a liberal tax on every rose-bush they have passed, their hands are full of flowers, and they make a fair picture indeed, as they stand together binding their roses into bouquets on the emerald lawn. "You can carry home large bunches, if you like them,

Miss Galton, tied to the pommel of your saddle," Rhoda is saying with eager generosity, when further speech from her is arrested by the sight of a man's form turning the corner that leads from the alley of limes to the lawn, and, with a childish, unrestrained bound of delight, she goes forward to meet Mr. Grainger, who, as he sweeps his hat off in salutation to them, recognizes with pleasure the "Hablott Browne and Du Maurier girls," who had struck his sense of beauty so pleasantly on the common in the morning.

CHAPTER X.

RIDING TO WIN!

THERE is very little circumlocutionary ceremony in Rhoda's manner of making her old friend known to her new ones. "I am so glad you're back so soon to-day," she cries, clasping her hands round his arm and hanging confidently to it, as she leads him up to Isabel and Grace. "These are the Miss Galtons. You know about them, and all we've heard?"

As he stands, hat in hand, listening to his young friend and looking at the strangers, these latter have time to see that he is in every respect a finer-looking fellow than the man who is "leading the girl along"

in the picture they have been studying. Handsome as he undoubtedly is, with his clearly cut features and wavy golden hair and beard, he is no mere beauty-man, believing in little save its being his mission to win with ease, and destroy with impunity. There is no strained sentimentalism in the expression of his thoughtful blue eyes, no effort at picturesque effects in his dress, no conceited consciousness in his bearing. "Just an ordinary English gentleman," Grace thinks. "Not at all the sort of man to go about seeking to develop the dawning feminine spirit, as the young man is doing in his picture." Still, though she thinks this, she is conscious of a slight feeling of annoyance at witnessing the perfect freedom which marks the intercourse between this man, who seems to belong to her own class, and the handsome young rustic who is leaning on his arm.

"We have invaded your sanctuary and looked at your pictures in your absence,"

Grace says, in reply to a remark of his, to the effect that he "little thought, when they passed him on the common, that he was so soon to have the pleasure of knowing them." Then she goes on to add that, if she had seen him as they passed, she should have given way to the spirit of savagery that is engendered by solitude, treated him as a fellow-traveller in a desert, and spoken to him on the subject of that scenery, which had never done her such service previously.

"The scenery has done me several good turns. It is almost unbroken ground about here, and the novelty of it, more than any merit in my painting, has got me hung on the line two or three years following; but now that it has been the means of introducing me to you, I am more grateful to it than ever."

Grace is accustomed to speeches of this order. She is the sort of girl to whom men address them, partly because they

are easy of utterance, and partly because they understand that she will take them at quite their right valuation. But his words sound so strangely in Rhoda's ears that she drops his arm suddenly, and steps aside a pace or two, and watches the pair with a look of lowering discontent that presently darkens into a frown.

Grace is an adept in the light art of assuming an interest in anything that interests any new acquaintance who seems desirable. She is also a proficient in the practice of so pouring out words with no particular meaning in them, that they demand replies, and gives her current companion no courteous loophole by which he can escape, even if he be so minded. As she promenades up and down the lawn now, her hat tilted forward to shade her eyes, her dainty little nose buried now and again in the bunch of cream-coloured roses, and her graceful figure shown to the utmost advantage by the lines of the

habit, she chains Mr. Grainger to her side, and his attention to her words, in a way that looks like evil magic to Rhoda Norris. The latter cannot look at Isabel or listen to Isabel, who begins to wish that they had never come into this paradise, where this juvenile Eve is so palpably pining to be taught the lesson of good and evil by an artistic serpent. The poor child is miserably fascinated by a sight that experience has never prepared her for—the sight, namely, of the superficial, manly homage which men do pay to women of their own class. It may mean nothing—she cannot even define what she fears it may mean—but the sight of it hurts her horribly. As they saunter past her, careless of her presence, she hears him pleading for the gift of a rosebud, as if his heart were in the plea. Grace's reply to his request is a laughing recommendation to him to gather a flower for himself; but, at the same time, she begins carefully select-

ing two of the fairest buds in her bouquet, and as she gives them to him, Rhoda almost fancies that he clasps the hand that gives, as well as the flowers that are given.

“‘Ah! these roses something hold
Other roses seem to lack,’”

he says impressively; and Rhoda, who does not know that his words are a quotation, thrills with pain that makes her dumb and deaf to every other sound but those two voices, whose lightest tones fall upon her ears with fatal distinctness.

It is not revealed to the girl yet why she is suffering thus. She is coming to her womanly heritage of pain by degrees. The effect that makes her smart and wince as if she were being stung and stabbed is clear and vivid enough. But the cause is still dim and undefined. Poor little child! jealousy has got his cruel fangs in her heart, and she is so innocent and ignorant of the monster's existence and appearance that she can neither fight nor endeavour

to exorcise him. She only knows that never before has she been greedy of Mr. Grainger's smiles, and looks, and words—that never before has she grudged them to any one else. But now it takes the colour out of the flowers and sky to see him at what she unconsciously feels sure is his graceful best at this strange lady's side.

Presently her mother comes out from the house and across the lawn, to join them and summon them in to the early dinner, which she is too honest to call "luncheon." Her child is still only a child in her eyes, and she has given Rhoda a child's full liberty of action in the matter of intercourse with the young artist, who has treated her house like his home, and herself like his mother. But the scales fall from the mother's eyes in the course of the short progress she makes from the door, at which the macaw is chanting out curses in a reverential manner, and preening

his gorgeous plumage in the sun. There is something in the attitude of the young, pain-stricken, half-defiant figure that stands aloof from the others, that tells Mrs. Norris that the child will never know a child's uncalculating, unclouded happiness again. The mother sends a sharp glance from that young form that is stultified by its new agony, to the cause of it—the graceful young pair so full of vitality and the glory of life, who are passing away the sunny hour so pleasantly for themselves and each other. She looks at them, and her first feeling is one of unmitigated, unreasonable, praiseworthy anger against them both.

“He had no right to make himself so dear to the child, and this young lady has no right to come here and make him torture her,” she says to herself impetuously, at the first glimpse of this enemy, who has crossed her borders without beat of drum, and taken her daughter captive.

Then she calms herself, remembering that it is the common lot, and that Rhoda must share it sooner or later, no matter what precautions are taken. But though she calms herself, she resolves that the young artist's sojourn with her shall come to an end with all convenient speed.

She has thought and re-thought all these and many other things in the course of a few moments, and now her voice is quiet and equable as ever, as she raises it a semitone to say—

“Rhoda, dear, ask the young ladies and Mr. Grainger to come in. And just go and brush your hair, child; you're looking as wild as a colt.”

The girl takes the hint and flees, leaving the young ladies and Mr. Grainger to be called in by her mother. Rhoda tears up to her own room, looks in the glass, and glares at herself for having rough, ruddy hair, and a face as full of lights and shades as a turbulent river.

"If I were smooth, and white, and cool looking, he wouldn't forget me, and pass me as if I wasn't there, for the sake of the first fresh face he sees," she sobs. And then she droops her face into her hands, and gives a wail of anguish as she thinks, "Supposing he goes away for the sake of some new face; supposing I'm never his one pet and companion any more?" She has to pour water copiously over her head, in order to cool down the heat engendered by these suppositions, and while her hair is still wet and tousled, she is called peremptorily to dinner, and goes down looking like a young water-spaniel.

It is a mid-day dinner, and it is hot; but, in spite of these two drawbacks, it is pervaded by an air of refinement that is absolutely soothing. Flowers deck the table lavishly; ferns cast a cool shade over the flowers. Rhoda, in the midst of her unmanageable, because undefined, misery, feels a thrill of family pride and satisfac-

tion in the admiration which Miss Grace Galton visibly feels and volubly expresses.

“What a charming arrangement of food and flowers! Mrs. Norris, you have made the food quite an æsthetic element by the way you have made it mingle with bright blossoms and green leaves. Isabel, why does our table never look like this?”

“Because we haven’t the taste for floral decoration that Mrs. and Miss Norris evidently possess,” Isabel rejoins.

“Or because we haven’t a Mr. Grainger to develop the taste,” Grace says, directing a Parthian glance at the man of whom she speaks. “The fact is, we have grown up in an atmosphere of non-perception, and so we lose the benefit of half the beauty that is about us, for want of knowing where to look for it, and through being afraid to recognize it if we haven’t been properly introduced. Even after the little I have seen of you to-day, Mr. Grainger, I shall look at that common as we recross it with new

eyes, for now you have told me what to see in the distances, when the light falls on the heather that covers the hillsides."

Naturally he answers this. It is a challenge to him to go on telling her of other effects, and teaching her where to look for that which has been about her all her life, but which she naïvely confesses she has never seen before. The two carry on conversation with an easy swing that is habitual and commonplace enough to them both, but that seems to Rhoda to be fraught with sweet, malignant, subtle poison. Only once during the course of the meal does he find time to address a word to this child who has grown up in the house with him for the last three years—the fond, faithful little shadow, who has been ever at his elbow, ready to do his bidding at every turn.

"Well, little one," he says, as he looks towards her at last, and finds her eyes bent upon him with such an expression of

pathetic pain and passion, that he is startled into saying something—"well, little one, how shaggy you're looking to-day. Have you been dipping your head in the pond, and combing your hair in the sedges this morning?"

"I have done nothing but gather flowers and put them in your blue jars," she bursts forth; and it is with difficulty that she restrains herself from going on to tell him that her mother had appointed several duties ("tasks" she almost feels them to be now), such as mending stockings, and feeding poultry, and superintending the cleaning of the dairy, every one of which she has neglected for the sake of gathering the flowers he likes to see in his blue-and-white china. But she does restrain herself, for she sees that his attention wanders from her the moment he has ceased speaking to her, and that his eyes are bent, with a look of lazy admiration in them, on the pearly reflec-

tions and delicately cut features of Miss Grace Dalton's face. He is telling Grace how charming he had thought her *pose* on horseback when she passed him on the common, and how she had looked to him like a living "Hablot Brown," the very ideal "Polly Dill" or "Jemmy Meek" of Lever's novels. And Grace is accepting his flatteries, and tacitly taking credit to herself for being the perfect horsewoman she is not.

"Your pony looks as if he had plenty of jumping powder in his heels," he remarks. "I should like to see you put him at something. There's no prettier sight in the world, I think, than that of a lady sitting a flying leap as if she and her horse were one."

"I should be very glad to show you the spectacle, if we had time to-day," Grace says uneasily; for, though her vanity would urge her on to do almost any deed, however rash, that should make her appear

fairer or more attractive in the eyes of men, she is conscious the whole while that, if she attempted a flying leap, or indeed a leap of any sort, confusion would most probably be her portion. She is able to sit squarely and well in her saddle while her horse maintains a decorous bearing; but anything untoward in the way of jumping, or bucking, or shying would end, she feels pretty sure, in her making an ignominious descent from the position she occupies so prettily while her steed merely exemplifies the poetry of motion in a walk or a canter. But Mr. Grainger is ignorant of these misgivings on her part, and so, being anxious to make a study of a girl and a horse in action, he presses the point of a display being made of the pony's powers; and, Rhoda suggesting a meadow with a "water-jump and a fence, with a splendid take-off, in it" for the practising ground, Grace finds herself hurried into undertaking a feat from the mere contemplation of which her spirit quails.

Something seems to tell Rhoda that her hour of triumph is at hand, as they rise from the table at last, and Mr. Grainger offers to go and "bring the pony round." The girl does not hear a quick, earnest, cautionary remark addressed to Grace by Isabel, but the nervous indecision in Grace's face and manner is discernible enough. "I don't believe she can ride a bit, the vain, affected thing!" Rhoda says to herself contemptuously; "but she'll pretend to him that she can do everything that he admires, and will make out that it's the pony's fault, if there's a blunder or a tumble." She comes to this conclusion as she saunters half round to the stable, and loiters about, waiting for Mr. Grainger to return with the pony. A few hours ago she would have gone with him freely, and as a matter of course. But a shadow has fallen between them from her point of view, and so, though she goes a little way to meet him, she does it with an air of

sullen shyness that would tell her story very plainly to him—if only he had time to pause and read it.

But he is engrossed with the handsome little pony, and his anticipations of the pretty picture which the pony and his fair rider will make together presently. Rhoda, standing in the pathway watching for him with eyes that are full of unshed tears, is regarded by him merely as a means to an end with which she has no concern.

“Look here, little one,” he says (not even looking at her as he speaks). “Just see that the girths are all right, will you? The little beggar has been blowing himself out with beans and hay.”

Rhoda gives a careless glance at the girths.

“Beans will put the ‘jumping powder’ you spoke of into his heels, if anything will; and Miss Galton had better see to her girths herself. I always do when I ride.”

“It’s not likely that she knows anything

about saddling her horse," he says impatiently. "How ungracious you are, Rhoda! What made you sulk all through dinner? You would do well to get friendly with the Miss Galtons. Refined female companionship is just exactly what you want."

"I dare say she knows just as much about saddling her horse as she does about riding him," Rhoda says scornfully. But her words fall unheeded on his ear. He is absorbed in the pony, and the prospect of what is to come; and, admiring Grace already, he foresees that, before this afternoon's work is over, he will have reason to admire her more for her graciousness in becoming the exponent of the poetry of motion at his request.

Meanwhile, the sisters have had a conversation with a touch of wrangling in it.

"You're not going to be foolish enough to try to take that pony over anything, are you, Grace?" Isabel says anxiously.

horse over the water-jump and bit of timber in the meadow. So now, as she walks along by Isabel's side, she unconsciously assumes that Miss Galton is as entirely at ease about her sister, as she (Mrs. Norris) would be herself if Rhoda were in the saddle.

"What a pretty figure your sister has! and it's on horseback that the pretty figures show best, I think," she says admiringly.

By the time Isabel has responded to this compliment in a vague and half-hearted kind of manner, they find themselves in the meadow; and Grace, whose cheeks are paling fast, starts the pony at a sharp canter for the water-jump.

"How he's jiffing!" Rhoda cries excitedly, as they see the pony break from his canter to a gallop, and then, with many wriggles and contortions, subside into a trot. "Why, she's pulling his mouth to pieces, taking him tightly on the curb! There! *Of course*, he won't take it. What horse

would, curbed up in that way? She can't ride a bit, Mr. Grainger."

The pony has undoubtedly refused the little brook, though Grace, with much pretty pretence of determination (which does not take Rhoda in for a moment), seems to hold him to it. Presently she gives up the feigned attempt with a pretty petulant gesture, and comes cantering back to the group who are watching her.

"The poor little fellow's heart failed him when he came to the very brink," she says apologetically. "Did you see how he put his head down and turned aside?"

"I don't think *his* heart failed him," Rhoda says eagerly. "You held him in so hard that he couldn't help himself. I don't think the pony wants pluck."

"Don't you, really? Perhaps you'd like to test it?" Grace says suavely. She understands very much better than Rhoda does herself what the poor child is feeling, and why she is feeling it. There is no pity

in Grace's heart for the passionate pain that is gnawing at the heart-strings of this "untutored young savage," as she considers Rhoda. The youngest Miss Galton has no sort of toleration for any one's pretensions but her own—more especially has she none for pretensions that may chance to interfere with her own. "The uncouth little monkey! She thinks that I am to be taunted by her into risking my neck by trying the fence. I'll make her get up just as she is—she'll look like a sack of flour in the saddle in that holland blouse—and if she does have a tumble, and doesn't hurt herself much, I shall not be very sorry."

She surrenders the pony, and goads Rhoda into mounting him, with a bitterly sweet admixture of courtesy and cruelty.

"*Do* try him, please!" she says. "You have such strong-looking hands and arms that he won't have a chance of swerving, if you make up your mind that he shall

go straight." And she is off her pony as she speaks, indicating to Mr. Grainger by a gesture that he is to offer his aid in hoisting Rhoda into the place she has vacated.

"She'll look like a bundle, and make a mess of the jump," Grace tells herself pleasantly. But she feels shaken in this agreeable conviction the moment Rhoda comes down to her saddle and gathers up her reins. In spite then of the full loose dress, it is to be seen at once that the girl and her little steed are one. She turns his head towards the water-jump, drops the curb, and takes him on the snaffle only ; and the high-couraged little horse feels sympathetically sure that this is real business. He takes the water-jump in his stride, and makes neither halt nor blunder at the timber-fence.

"He won't refuse again—will you try him now?" she says to Grace Galton ; and Grace casts prudence aside, as she detects

a half-smile flitting over Mr. Grainger's face, in reply to a broad one that Miss Rhoda has flashed at him.

"I must do it now," she thinks, striving to nerve herself to the task by a consideration of the hopelessness of attempting to avoid performing it. "I'll do as she did—give him his head—and he'll take me over as easily as he did her; I won't be triumphed over by this country bumpkin."

"Grace, we ought to be well on our way home," Isabel says, making a vain effort to arrest proceedings which her prophetic heart warns her will end in the downfall of her sister.

"Never mind ; it will get cooler as the days goes on," Grace says recklessly, for by this time she has made up her mind that Mr. Grainger must be carried away from all consideration for "this gawky child" by a *coup*. And as she speaks she mounts the pony again, and goes as gallantly as she can for the fence.

Goes as gallantly as she can ; but her heart is in her mouth, instead of being sent over the hedge. The little pony is plucky enough, and can jump his own height easily, when he is properly handled. But his rider worries him by becoming leaden-handed just as he pulls himself together for the spring. He could negotiate doubly as stiff a fence as this under more favourable circumstances, but Grace is unadvisably pulling his nose into his chest just as he rises. Consequently he jumps short, strikes the bank with his forelegs, and flounders head over heels into the adjoining field.

"Miss Grace has fallen free," Rhoda says reassuringly to Isabel, as the latter utters a broken exclamation of terror, and tries to run to her sister's aid. "She shot out of the saddle as the pony rose, and would have had her fall all the same, even if he had gone over like a bird."

They cluster about Grace, and wipe the

dust off her habit and battered-in hat. But in spite of all the sympathy they proffer her, they cannot help seeing that there is a good deal of ignominy in her position. She has essayed a little leap, and has let herself slip at the take-off. If she had only held on till the pony landed, it might have been supposed that her fall was due to his awkwardness. But as it is, she has shown herself an impostor, as far as the art of riding is concerned.

CHAPTER XI.

“ FREE ! ”

“ WHAT a wretched return ! ” Grace sobs in genuine distress, as they find themselves wending their weary way along the Galtonswear avenue just as the burden and heat of the day is over, and the cool, comforting shadows of evening are falling.

“ We must make the best of it, so as not to distress mother,” Isabel says tiredly, as she limps along, for her feet are aching in harmony with her head and heart. In addition to Grace’s downfall and discomfiture, there are the pony’s broken knees to be thought of and paid for ; and how

this latter thing is to be done is one of those perplexing mysteries that harass penniless women, from the day of their responsibility till the day of their death.

"There's no best to be made of it," Grace says impatiently. "These humble efforts at enjoyment always end badly, for the simple reason that one's 'humblest efforts' are sure not to be backed up by coin of the realm. If this brute of a pony had been mine, or if I could afford to pay double their value for his horrible little knees, he wouldn't have broken them; as it is—— Oh, Isabel! my helplessness makes me wicked. Why didn't he tumble with that girl, and break her neck and his own before I tried him at that fence!"

"As that awful calamity didn't befall her, we must bear the consequences of your blunder, Grace. For it was a blunder. You knew you couldn't sit a jump, but you risked the danger for the sake of trying to dazzle that young man; and now poor

Rowley will have to suffer for your vanity, for the pony's knees must be paid for."

Isabel does not say this in a tone that can be construed unpleasantly by the most quarrelsome ears; she states a harsh fact clearly. And Grace feels no resentment, for she knows that the softest rendering of it would have left the fact as harsh and difficult to deal with as ever.

"Rowley shall *not* suffer for my folly. I'm sorry enough for it all now; and, as I said just now, I wish the pony had broken that Miss Rhoda's neck before I broke his knees. But, Isabel, is there nothing we can sell of our own? Surely there is? Your watch and mine are worth more than this pony."

"But, my dear child, how are we to dispose of them?" Isabel asks, sacrificing her own watch in spirit instantly.

"I will undertake all that, if you will see Attwood to-night, and stop his tongue, and negotiate with him as to the sum he will

think suffices to remunerate him for those mere scratches on the little beast's knees. There's your diamond ring, too ; that had better go——”

“ And your locket ? ” Isabel suggests.

“ No, I can't part with my diamond locket,” Grace says, as determinately as if it were Isabel's difficulty that they were discussing, instead of her own. “ I can't part with the locket, because, you see, I wear it so constantly that mamma would miss it; and, as you say, she mustn't be distressed. But no one ever sees your ring, so it and the watches shall go ; and oh, dear, what a relief to have settled it ! There's an end of our escapade and its consequences.”

“ Hardly ‘our’ escapade ? ”

“ Well, you might have had some of such fun as there was going on, if you had liked ; but you don't throw yourself into the spirit of intimacy and sympathy with a stranger the first time you see him as I do. Moreover——”

"Moreover, I should have had some sort of feeling for that poor little hero-worshipping child, who didn't like seeing her old friend engrossed by a stranger."

"Little hero-worshipping donkey!" Grace says contemptuously. "It's good for her to see that he has only taken her as he has the curds and whey, and cream, and oaten bread, and other farmhouse luxuries. Why, he treats her as a child; you can see it."

"Only there is this to be said: she is past childhood, and has learnt to love him as a woman."

"Then she's horribly precocious," Grace laughs; "and I'll help to save her from the disappointments she will have to endure if she goes on nursing her foolish fancies. Did I tell you that Mr. Grainger was coming to call on us to-morrow?"

"Oh, Grace, you are incorrigible, and fearfully wanting in even the lowest kind of worldly wisdom. What shall we do

with this stranger in our desolate, misery-clouded home? If he were true and tried, if he loved you and you loved him, and he came and lifted a corner of the cloud, and stood bravely by your side under its shadow, I should applaud you for your courage and frankness in having him here; but *can* you lower your flag, and indulge in 'gay fooling' here in this house, which is permeated by our great sorrow?"

"I declare I believe you would like me to walk in a funeral procession all the days of my life!" Grace says, leaping impatiently from the pony, as they come up to the door. Then she goes in, and to her room without delay, leaving Isabel to get rid of the unfortunate little steed, and to explain to his still more unfortunate and most aggrieved owner how the mischance has befallen him, and what steps she and her sister are prepared to take to recompense him for the damage done.

The evening and night wear themselves

away at Hengeholme as elsewhere in the world, in spite of that novel heavy-heartedness of Rhoda's, which makes every moment that she does not spend in sight of Mr. Grainger seem an hour in length. She has not lost her childhood's healthy habit of early rising, and long before the breakfast is ready she is out in the garden, trying new combinations of flowers and new effects of foliage and grasses that will "go well" in his blue china vases.

When he comes down at length, and she looks shyly up from her place behind the coffee-pot, she sees that her flowers are failing to attract him. He is looking at her. For the first time she feels conscious, embarrassed, uncomfortable under his gaze, and involuntarily her hands go up to her head.

"Am I looking again as if I had dipped my head in the duck-pond and combed my hair in the sedges, that you stare at me in that way?" she exclaims impa-

tiently, trying to lift her eyes to his unflinchingly, and failing as she feels the blood rise scorchingly to her cheeks.

"No ; you're looking strikingly civilized to-day," he laughs. "You've imitated Miss Grace Galton's style of *coiffure*, and your gory locks look better in their normal state of tousle. You mustn't take the liberty of altering yourself in any way, little one ; at least, not till I have done painting you."

Mrs. Norris has been watching for an opportunity of giving him a hint to depart from their midst ever since the change came over her child on the previous day. She fancies the present a good one, and takes it in a manner that she means to be spontaneous and uncalculating, and unsuggestive of anything like a back thought.

"I suppose you'll soon be thinking of going away, Mr. Grainger?" she begins, with a smile on her face, and an emotional ball in her throat. She feels it to be her

duty to dislodge this man from his place in their home and her daughter's heart, before that heart has gone irrecoverably into his careless keeping. But though she is goaded on to do the deed by her sense of duty, the conviction that she is doing the latter does not render her blind or callous to the fierce fury which fills her daughter's heart at this first crude effort to awaken her from her "love's young dream." She sees that Rhoda is absolutely glaring at her, and she fears that Mr. Grainger will clearly perceive the reason why Rhoda glares. The knowledge has dawned upon the mother suddenly, that this child of hers is full of a power of loving that will make her omnipotent, above all control, for a time—full of undeveloped passion that will be more than pleasant while it is prosperous, more than painful when it is passed, and desperately dangerous should it ever be thwarted. "If I can only get him away before she interests

him into trying to interest her still further, there won't be much harm done," Mrs. Norris says to herself, as she waits for his answer to her opening speech.

"Do you want to get rid of me?" he asks, looking up with laughing incredulity. "The spirit of change has come over the place, and no mistake! Rhoda has changed her hair, and you have changed your heart towards me for some reason or other."

He grows more earnest in tone and manner as he proceeds; and Mrs. Norris, who has been fond of him in a semi-maternal way for three years, is touched almost to tears, and quite to tenderness, by his appeal.

"It's not that I want to get rid of you, Mr. Grainger; I know too well how we—how *I* shall miss you when you are gone." She quite begins to repent herself of having opened the ball, for Rhoda has suffered an agonized expression to supersede the glare of wrath which reigned on

her face a minute ago, and the mother feels that agony will be her child's portion quite frequently enough in this world, without any maternal efforts to forestall the inevitable. Still, painful as it is to her to hurt the child temporarily, she feels that a good sharp parting pang may be an easier and pleasanter thing for Rhoda to bear, than a long-drawn-out experience of "hope deferred." And so, though she tells Mr. Grainger that she does not "want to get rid of him," she is very glad to be able to add that the "Dowager Lady Galton has written to secure lodgings at Hengeholme for herself and her maid," and feels honestly justified in adding that the "Dowager Lady Galton, being one of the family, must be considered before any stranger, however personally dear that stranger may be to her (Mrs. Norris)."

"And so it's settled that I am to be turned out?" he says softly. "Rhoda, this being the case, I will stay at home to-day

and work away at your picture, instead of going to Galtonswear as I had promised."

"Were—you going? Why were you going to Galtonswear?" she asks, with eager jealousy.

"Why? Because they—or, at least, one of them—asked me to go," he answers carelessly. "She's a pretty girl, that Miss Grace Galton, and it's always worth a fellow's while to go a little out of his way to see more of a pretty girl, so long as it's his object in life to paint the species. However, I won't go out of my way to-day for a pretty girl; I'll stay here, and make the best and the most—of you."

He says it all with light, laughing, indifferent gallantry, just as he has said similar things to her any time within the last three years. But she listens to his utterances with a new understanding, a sharpened perception, to-day.

"And the best and most you can make of me won't be as good, you feel, as what

you could make of Miss Grace Galton, if you saw a little more of her?" the girl says questioningly.

"I don't know that," he says, with candid doubtfulness. "I'm not quite sure whether your colour and intensity aren't better worth painting than her cool greys and grace; but, anyway, Rhoda, I'll either give up Galtonswear to-day, or take you with me. Which shall it be?"

"Oh, mother, let me go," Rhoda pleads fervently, seized by the unaccountable, uncontrollable feminine desire to see together once again the only pair whose conduct towards one another has the power to cause her any pain. Also she pictures that progress she will make across the breezy common with Mr. Grainger by her side, and the picture gives her passionate pleasure as it grows vividly before her, for she will be alone with him—just the two of them—and none other for five sunny miles. Then

will come the shades of Galtonswear. But before they are reached, "Who knows what may have happened?" the girl says to herself rapturously.

"Remember, you're not a child any longer," her mother remarks to Rhoda, when the latter comes down, dressed in the freshest and most piquant of Dolly Varden costumes, ready for her walk.

"Oh, mother dear, are you going to say that I may have my new dress made with a train?"

"I'm going to say that though there's nothing in it, we all know, still you mustn't be quite so free in your manner to Mr. Grainger as you used——"

"Free!"

There is such an amount of indignant protest and interrogation in the tone in which Rhoda utters that one word, that her mother is almost satisfied that her fears are groundless. But before she can

frame a sentence that will quite befit the occasion—a sentence, in fact, that endorses her own previously briefly expressed views, and also one that shows entire confidence in her child—before she can accomplish this feat, Rhoda opens the flood-gates of loving, jealous wrath, and lets the waters of speech overwhelm reticence and her mother.

"Free! I can never be that or anything else that's happy and pleasant with him again, after your saying that to me, mother. I shall be so stiff and rude to him that he'll learn to hate me; and who shall I have to thank for that change? My own mother!"

"If that change comes, it's his own vain changefulness and another pretty face that you'll have to thank for it, Rhoda," Mrs. Norris cries emotionally. Like the parrot who inadvertently interrupted prayers with an appalling oath, the unlucky mother "is sorry she spoke" now, for she feels

that her ill-advised speech has given form and substance to some of Rhoda's vague and undefined imaginings. "I'd better have let them go on just the same, and taken no notice of it, for the short time he'll be here," she says to herself remorsefully, as she kisses poor Rhoda's burning, tear-stained face. "There, don't cry any more, child!" she says aloud, anxiously but wearily; "and hold a wet flannel to your eyes. Don't let him see how it's been with you. Your face is in a fever, Rhoda, but the fresh air will soon take that down."

"I'm not going into the fresh air," Rhoda says, with a pout.

"Why, you're going across the common to Galtonswear?"

"No, mother, not after what you've said," Rhoda raves. She feels that a change is going to be introduced into her free, friendly, hearty, and happy relations with Grainger, and as she must blame

some one for it, and will not blame him, it is only cruelly natural that she should "kick where she dare," and flagellate her mother.

"No, not after what you've said," she repeats, shaking her head like a savagely resigned young tiger. "The fresh air would do me no good, while I walked along feeling you were angry with me for being civil to him, and he was hating me for being uncivil. He shall go by himself; and they'll be kind to him and polite as ladies are, and he'll mark the difference between them and us, and go from us altogether, and then you'll be pleased."

But in spite of this expressed determination, Rhoda is by Mr. Grainger's side when he starts for Galtonswear.

CHAPTER XII.

“SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR.”

It is altogether inauspicious. Isabel is on household cares intent, when Mr. Grainger and his happily unsophisticated young companion reach Galtonswear. Accordingly, the greeting they receive from her is not one that is well calculated to calm Rhoda's perturbed spirit, and make her feel perfectly at peace with herself and the controlling circumstances that have brought her here. Grace is agitated, partly because a satisfactory arrangement has not been arrived at about the pony's damaged knees, and partly because the man on whose artistic nature she had intended exercising

her wiles is accompanied by a fierce, pure young guardian angel, in the shape of a girl who is evidently so ready to "let love be the lord of all," as far as she is herself concerned, that she will not supinely submit to the sight of falsity to, or feigning of, the passion on the part of another.

Another disturbing element in the Galtons' uncomfortable *ménage* deserves, or rather demands, a fuller narration than either of the others, and that is the unexpected presence in it of the virtual head of the house, Rowley himself.

He has come down abruptly, and taken them all by surprise in a way that does not win gratitude even from Isabel, though she is in a measure responsible for his act. He has come down to "see for himself how things are going," as his eldest sister's letters have filled him with alarms and anxieties lately, not so much on account of what she has said as on account of what she has left unsaid. Depression has evi-

dently been reigning in her soul as she has written, and still she has told him nothing that is definitely distressing or disagreeable. Intuitively he has felt from the tone of Isabel's letters that things are going worse than they absolutely need go at desolate Galtonswear. So he has come down without beat of drum; and to add to the confusion his startling advent causes in the meagre household, he has come accompanied by Alice and Wallace Adair.

Not even the pleasure of seeing her favourite friend, not even the hope that her favourite friend's presence here in this wise signifies that she has come to a clear understanding with Rowley, does away with Isabel's feeling that Alice's arrival is inopportune, to say the least of it. In vain the latter avows her readiness to take up a large share of the burden of the extra work and forethought that is called into immediate requisition by the presence of

visitors. All the arrangements to be made are so very small and insignificant, that it is a matter of small wonder that a daughter of the house should shrink from admitting "even Alice" to a full knowledge of the pettiness of the details which now make up the sum of daily life at Galtonswear.

"If it means that they are engaged, I won't mind it a bit," Isabel says to herself, as she taxes her patience and ingenuity in endeavouring to teach a cook, whose notions are as crude as the materials she has to deal with, how to manufacture a satisfactory repast for the tired and hungry travellers, who, having come down by a night train, are in that state of nervous tension which want of rest and a certain amount of most unusual and not altogether pleasing excitement is apt to engender.

There is a good deal of pain and pathos in the meeting between poor harassed Lady Galton and the girl whom she (Lady

Galton) has long looked upon as her son's future wife. Through the stages of childhood, girlhood, and young womanhood, Alice has been equally dear to her old friend, and her old friend does recall with satisfaction that, in the brief days of her own glory, she has never been unmindful of Alice. "I always wanted to have you with us, dear, when things were happier," she says, as she prepares to return to that sorrowfully bitter charge of hers. And Alice understands all the kindness that has brought her poor wearied-out hostess forth from that guarded room, and sympathizes with all the fear that prompts such a speedy return to it.

"Who is that fellow Grace has picked up now?" Rowley asks of Isabel, as he comes athwart the latter in the course of her domestic duties.

"An artist lodging at Hengeholme," Isabel replies briefly.

"And the girl?"

"Mrs. Norris's daughter."

"Upon my word, Grace should be more careful," Rowley says, with an air of vexation, as he watches the two out on the lawn.

"About which of them, Rowley?—the 'fellow,' as you call him, or Miss Norris?"

"About both of them. He's down here sketching, I suppose, and amusing himself meanwhile to the best of his ability; and Grace encourages the folly, and throws a dangerous air of respectability about it, by inviting them here together. That may mislead the mother. How is a woman like Mrs. Norris to understand that the studio life isn't conducive to matrimony? I'm——"

"I must do Grace the justice to say that she didn't ask Miss Norris to come here," Isabel says hesitatingly.

"But she asked that fellow?"

"Well, not exactly asked, but understood that he would call to-day. I think

she is quite as much annoyed as you can be that Miss Norris came with him."

"Then what is Grace after?" the brother asks pugnaciously.

"After passing the time, I fancy. Rowley, you know what Grace is—born to please, born to attract, and now with so few opportunities of exercising her birth-gift."

"Born to bother!" Rowley says gruffly. "Let her exercise her gifts at home, and help the mother and you. I can't stand the sight of her philandering out there, posing to please his artistic eyes, I suppose."

"Rowley, she is so much like you, or like, rather, what you have been; but your philandering days are over, aren't they, dear? It's all right with Alice and you, isn't it?"

"Quite right," he says coldly. "I'll never plunge a woman into poverty if I can help it. Alice and I said farewell to the old

romance in the most sensible way possible, when I proposed that she should come down here and be a working sister among us *all*, and she agreed to the proposition."

"And you think you said farewell to the old romance because she accepted the fraternal situation in order to be near you and help yours? Rowley, dear, our cousin's widow is a darling woman; but she would never put herself in the position of being suspected of accepting any terms you like to offer her. Alice has done this; Alice's love is the truest and bravest."

"And Annie's is the most perplexing and enthralling," Rowley says to himself, as he strolls out to join the group on the lawn, and see what he can make of the "artist, and Mrs. Norris's daughter."

He makes this out and no more, namely, that Grace's high-bred charm and Rhoda's unstudied, almost savage, beauty are just useful 'studies' to Mr. Grainger, and nothing more. Having arrived at

this conclusion, it gives him a spasm of astonishment that almost amounts to a pang of dread, when Rhoda tells them that "Mother expects the dowager down to lodge with them for a few months."

END OF VOL. II.

